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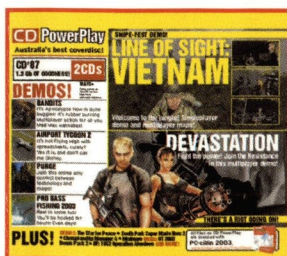
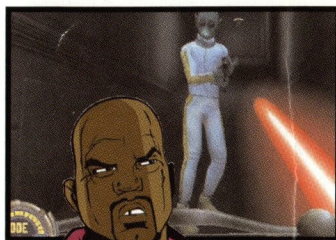
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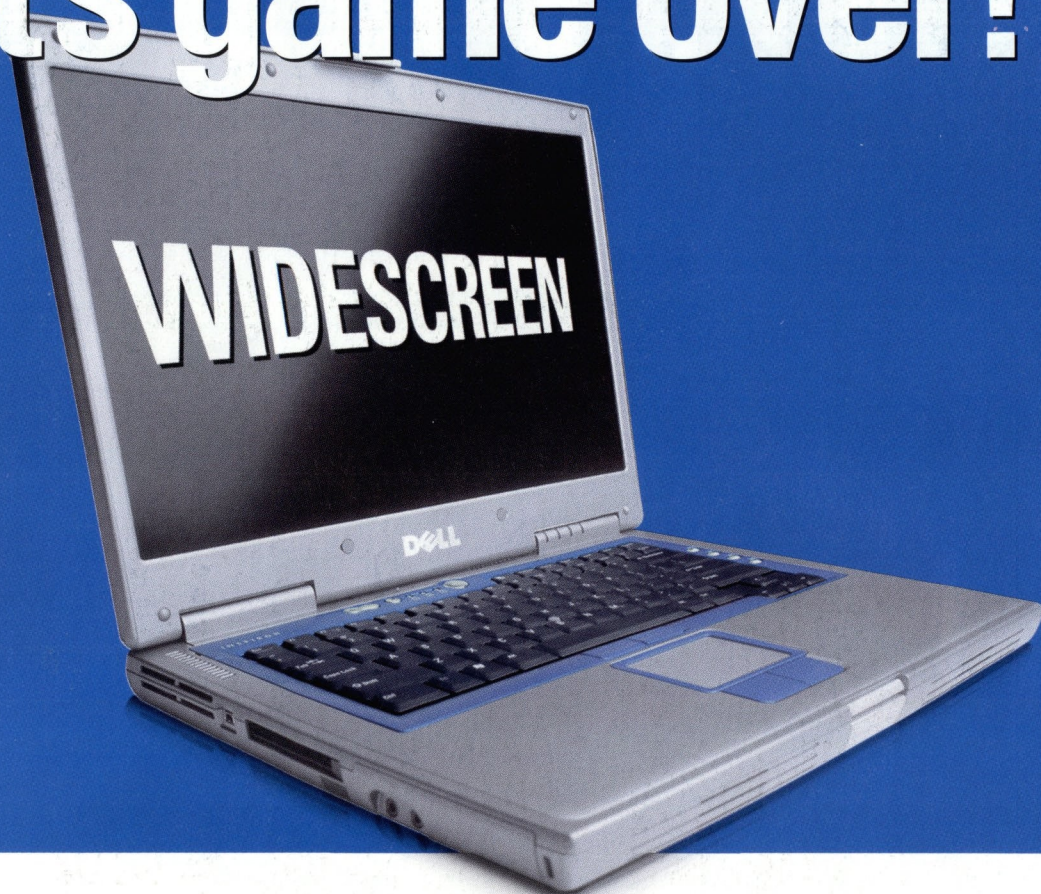
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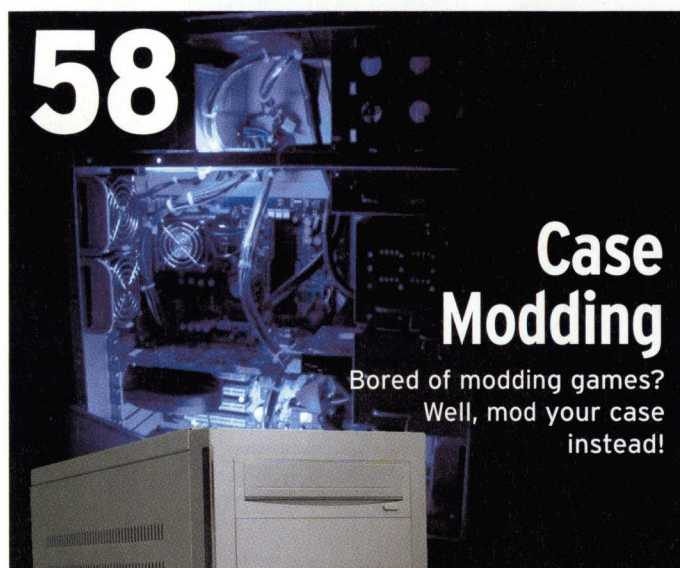


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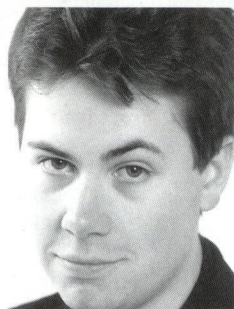
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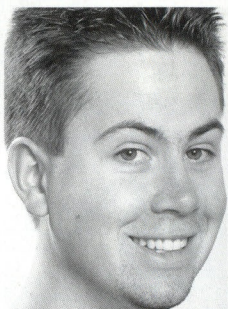
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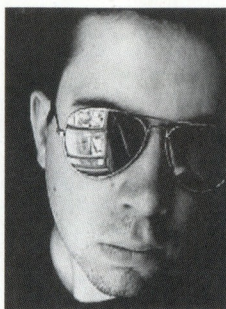
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Entering post-rehabilitation chemically-stressed psychosis



A jaded but more experienced and wizened games journo

And so the wheel turns. To paraphrase Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*, Fordham is out and Wildgoose is in. That's right, the wheel may be turning, but in this case it's kind of rolled forward and backward at the same time.

For those new to PCPP, David Wildgoose was Staff Writer here at the magazine's Redfern offices for many years before finally becoming Editor in 2000. He handed the controls to me in late 2001 to pursue his fortunes, as they say, abroad. However, his inexorable march toward success has lead him inevitably back to the helm of the very mag that in many ways spawned him. See, PCPP is like some enormous black hole and all caught within its massive grip will be spun and spun about its dark core until they eventually crash, or crash through.

This rule applies to me, too - I won't be going far, but will remain as PCPP's Editor-at-Large, the guy who's always just over the horizon, pursuing some cool new concept for the mag or chasing down another elusive developer for an interview. It's a more mobile role, and, hopefully, one that will allow me to See the World (tm)! Expect to see my name associated with Australia's PC gaming Journal of Record for many years to come, barring the amputation of both my hands, the explosion of my PC and the passing of a law preventing anyone with an exploded PC from buying a new PC.

Now is probably a good time to take a brief look down memory lane. I've been at PCPP's Redfern offices since December 2000, and my first ever review for the mag was of Westwood's *C&C: Red Alert 2*. I gave it 91, and to this day I have never been able to satisfactorily decide whether or not I scored it too high. Some days I think its level of innovation was limited and its singleplayer campaign simplistic. Then I IRC with yet another gaggle of breathless *RA2* multiplayer fans who insist it was the RTS that got them online and kept them there. So, I think in the end, the 91 stands. Ironstorm, however, might just be a different story...

This is also an opportunity for me to make a confession. To me, one of the best lines in any of my reviews was at the beginning of *Heist* (PCPP#62), a game that I scored a spectacular 7%. It began "Heist is an anagram for shite, which is astoundingly apt..." I have to now admit that this excellent line was actually the creation of David Wildgoose himself, but the subhead "American McGee's Scandisk" was all mine.

The little crappy games were always a personal favourite, and it's a shame that there aren't more of these today. I recall once writing of *Mission Humanity* (PCPP#61) that "if bashing your head in a tray full of glass, rusty nails and used syringes while your arse is on fire gets you off then for you *Mission Humanity* is nothing short of the greatest game ever." A friendly Ozisoft PR cracktrooper later remarked that by simply cutting the first half of the paragraph, that frothy comment could have been altered to make *Mission Humanity* look very good indeed.

Speaking of editing, Editing-with-a-capital-E this behemoth of a magazine has always been a huge challenge, but your continual support and kind comments via email and other (sometimes unconventional) media always kept my motivation high. There were tears, there were tantrums, but at the end of the day no one could say that we didn't get the mag out on time. Sure, sometimes half the pages were glued in upside down, but we could always blame the printers for that sort of thing.

So, it comes time for me to sign off, and hand the big joystick of +12 Dominance back to David Wildgoose, strap him into the big comfortable chair of managerial responsibility, and give him a good shove towards the future. Gee, it sure is bright out there...

And a final shout out - here's to Shari 'Notboy' Davies, Art Director extraordinaire. She took a mish-mash and created a masterpiece, and thanks to her, PCPP is now the best looking PC mag on the block. From here, it can only get better. Expect tweaks, expect further refinements until the mag shines with such brilliance it will make your eyes explode and dribble down the front of your skull like that bit in *Raiders of the Lost Art* that my best mate and I used to watch over and over on ultra-slow motion while his Rhodesian Ridgebacks drooled quietly into the carpet. But that's another story...

As for me, it's time to check in to an exclusive clinic for a rest cure, then back on the horse for 2003. Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy anyone? In any case, see you around the Interweb! All the best!

Anthony Fordham
Editor-at-Large
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INBOX

LETTER OF THE MONTH: Will trade his PC for an Xbox

Your editorial in the March issue about consoles was, coincidentally, my last subscription issue and prompted me to write to you, as I will not be renewing my subscription due to the fear you described in that editorial: consoles.

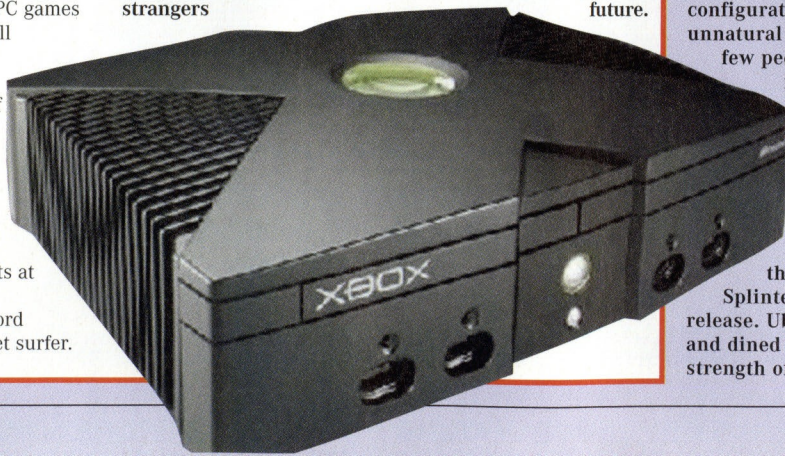
I have not bought a console before, but with PC being so expensive to upgrade and a machine with the power and quality of the Xbox coming on the market I found indeed the dark side was my destiny. The hard drive on the Xbox has enabled games like Morrowind to be released and with other RPGs on the way my gaming desires could now be met on a console. No more would I have to face constant upgrading to make sure my PC can run the latest games at a reasonable speed - \$500 for a graphics card, \$100 for extra RAM, a larger hard drive every three years, the list of components to a PC is growing. The Xbox is only priced just over \$300, and it should last 3-4 years before "XXbox" or "Double X" or what ever Microsoft will call it will come out and when it does, hopefully, it's not too more expensive than the original was. The console replacement is a lot less expensive than a PC games machine which will virtually have to be replaced over the same period of time for around \$2000.00. The quality of games available and the economics made my decision easy, and now my PC sits at home to remain upgradless as a word processor and a net surfer.

I fear that unless something changes in the world of PCs as you described, many more will follow me on my dark path. I wish to thank PC PowerPlay for the years of reading I have enjoyed. I have looked to the Xbox magazines for a replacement, but alas, you are a hard at to follow and there is nothing of the same standard. It is with sorrow I now walk away. Farewell.

Clinton

It's a sad day indeed when PC loyalists like Clinton here are forced to turn away from the light and toy with the devilry of console gaming. And yet, Clinton, I say to you, the PC itself is not at fault here. PC remains the only platform where - with the addition of a decent gamepad - it's possible to play every type of game. Text heavy gaming in particular is only really successful on a PC - can you imagine squinting at pages of text-based dialog from six feet away on a low-res TV screen? The current problem with PC gaming is not the platform, it's the games. PC has been playing games for the best part of 20 years now, and we're no strangers

to the curse of 'upgrade to play' - 286 owners, remember Wing Commander and Doom? And 386 owners, remember Strike Commander? The 486 had Quake, the Pentium had dozens of titles that needed a P2 to play properly, the upgrade headache has been around for ages. But for all those ages, there were hundreds of quality games available, and in the early years of the 21st Century, the average PC could play just about everything on the market. But now Big Graphics is giving developers unprecedented access to its new technology, so that new games - what few there are - focus on looks and little else. And with three major console platforms now in the market, and piracy still rife on PC, developers and publishers are turning to the lounge-room for big dollars, and leaving the study for Linux Geeks. But people will get bored with the Xbox soon enough. When the console honeymoon is over, developers should return to PC, and the games will flow once more. Hopefully then, Clinton, you'll return, to a bright new future.



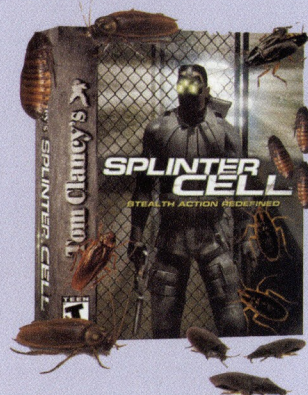
Disgusted with Splinter Cell

I just spent my last \$89 to grab a copy of the PC version of the highly anticipated Splinter Cell. But I wasn't surprised to find that once installed, the game gives me nothing but a black screen with a critical error message. Just like the wonderful demo you had on a recent CD: NOTHING WORKS. Why do these jerk offs at Ubi Soft send out a product like Splinter Cell and not have all the bugs ironed out beforehand? Why? Because they can't wait to start earning all that green they know they'll get, that's why! Lets hope this isn't an ongoing trend from upcoming titles. What's upsetting most of all, was hoping Doom 3 will work: gee what a surprise, "Critical Error". The lame ass amount of money you just spent on upgrading your 4 month old system, which, by the way, is now obsolete, has caused a failure on your attempt to play this game." So now, I am \$89 down and I still cannot get to play Splinter Cell. Well I know one thing, you can count me out as far as Raven Shield goes. Ubi soft has just lost a valued gamer.

Terrance Mulloy

Given the huge range of different PC configurations it's not unnatural that at least a few people will have issues with any new release... except that we've been inundated by incensed gamers, furious with the quality of Splinter Cell's retail release. Ubi Soft wined and dined us on the strength of this title, and

by all counts it was a runaway success on console. But even our review copy was plagued by bugs, and the control system was also a nightmare. Looks like Ubi Soft dropped the ball big time on this one, perhaps they were concentrating on Raven Shield's much lauded multiplayer capabilities?



Wants credit for his work

I'm an avid reader of PC PowerPlay and you've recently featured Games-Fusion.com's Counter-Strike pack weapon models on your CD. While it is undeniably an amazing pack of weapon models, there's something rather important that Laurence Norton (the owner of Games-Fusion.com) doesn't want you to know: he is, in fact, literally selling the work of the Half-Life modding community. This was brought to my attention when I found that my p228 skin (modelled by Sas.Stu) was included in the Fusion Pack. At first, I wasn't worried - until I found I was not credited for my work and neither were many of the other artists. In fact, many readme files that credited all of the artists had been intentionally removed! We have contacted Mr. Norton on NUMEROUS occasions with each release of a new Fusion

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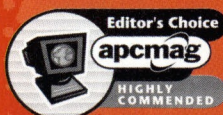
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FROM THE FORUMS: The disc is dead, long live the disc!

With DVD PowerPlay past its first birthday and still accelerating, the usual suspects on the PCPP Forums tackled the thorny issue of games on DVD-ROM. Is the CD doomed? And if so, how long before all our games will be on DVD-ROM? Join the discussion at www.pcppowerplay.com.au/forums

Posted: Mar/22/2003 10:07pm

Well, I'm personally hoping this is just the beginning, news is that the PC version of Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance will be DVD-ROM only. They say that due to the large size of the game, there will not be any CD version of the game. The fact that this will likely be a fairly hyped release might

bring that fact into the spotlight, and possibly start up the DVD-ROM revolution. Now, this sounds great to me, considering many more games are being released on multiple CDs nowadays, the move of games to DVD seems natural. Anyone disagree with this? Stebby, Counter Terrorist

Posted: Mar/22/2003 10:30pm

I was wondering if "Enter the Matrix" being supposedly 4.9GB would come on DVD, but the Infogrames website says it's a CD-ROM and that is all that is required at the moment. But then they may change their mind or it might come out on both. It's really just a matter of time. We are still waiting for games that will use full functionality of DirectX8 and will actually

need a GeForce3 as min requirement to run. Veefy, Jedi

Posted: Mar/23/2003 11:56am
But seriously, if you didn't have a DVD-ROM on your PC, wouldn't it indicate that your PC is too outdated to be able to play the games anyway? C'mon guys, don't complain about DVD - you can buy a DVD-ROM cheaper than a game nowadays. s!ckre, Templar

Posted: Mar/23/2003 1:53 pm

Another obstacle for people with crappy PCs, like myself. Surtur, Grunt

Posted: Mar/23/2003 5:45pm

Geez, DVD would be so much easier, as soon as games get larger and larger it will really

be needed, I think that any game that is 3 CDs or more should be definitely released on DVD, say UT2K3 for example. As most games are two CDs they're fine because one CD is installation. Partial installation, as well as play, on the 2nd CD with play is fine. BigBastard, Duke

Posted: Mar/23/2003 7:57pm

I think unless games start to be published on DVD only, people just aren't going to upgrade. And why would you? I would never upgrade my computer if game designers never got past making games for 386s. What would be the point? Still, it'll put a huge curb on casual piracy, at least until DVD-R drives get below that \$600 mark... Eloemosynator, Counter Terrorist

Posted: Mar/24/2003 9:52am

If developers created their games with only the DVD format in mind, imagine how much more stuff they could put into the games. There would be heaps more FMV and high quality soundtracks and stuff like that. At the moment, developers are forced into making all their games smaller to fit onto the damn CDs. MrFezZ, Tiesling

Posted: Mar/24/2003 7:55pm

I suppose those luddites who are pro CD-ROM will find out the hard way when they are installing and have to use 6 or so CDs and then accidentally lose one. The Specialist, Pit Drone

Pack, and with each new release, he continues to disregard our requests. The work he is stealing is created by talented artists, hobbyists and gamers who expect no money in return, and distributed via sites paid for out-of-pocket and not created for profit. Some of the stolen work even belongs to Gooseman, the creator of Counter-Strike. For your convenience here are numerous sites where 90% of the content in the fusion pack can in fact be downloaded for free! gunshop.clandeadgoat.net and csnation.counter-strike.net

Nic, AKA Thor

We didn't check this allegation with Laurence Norton, but hey, it's juicy gossip, so we're happy to print it!

Wonders about cool games

I was looking on the Net and noticed a lot of good games have come out recently or are just about to come out. Games like Dark Angel, Resident Evil Online, Getaway, Resident Evil Zero and Buffy The Vampire Slayer. I have found these games quite good, but there is something troubling me. All these games are only on those blasted consoles. It seems to me the games' creators are beginning to forget about the PC as a gaming platform and moving over to the consoles. There are a few questions I would like answered: what's going on and why some of the games which are rather good (Getaway being excellent) are only appearing on consoles?

Damo

Well, this is the thing, isn't it? As mentioned in this issue's LOTM, with three consoles on the market (not counting Gameboy Advance) there simply aren't enough developers to go around any more. Plus, when you develop for console you have the potential to reach the entire user base - everyone with a PS2 can play your PS2 game. The same is sadly not true of PC, where many users no longer have the power to run new releases like Unreal 2 and C&C Generals. Also, the games you've mentioned are very 'mass market' - either movie or TV tie-ins or long-running console franchises like Resident Evil. They have a proven audience on console,

and to them PC must just look like a minefield of angry Splinter Cell users... the horror, the horror.

Says PC seller is an idiot

I purchased a computer (Detailed specs truncated to prevent popular uprising due to jealousy - Ed) in August 2002 from James Computers Perth for \$1850.

The machine has been intermittently the most frustrating piece of technology I have ever had the misfortune to swear at. When I initially rang them, they said if the problem was software they would charge me and they recommended reformatting the hard disk. I was reluctant to reformat due to the amount of stuff I have to reinstall and reconfigure, plus the fact I had bought the computer to do some 3D work and was actually doing the work during this problem. So I persevered with the crashes and the locking-up and freezing cursor. I was soon offered work in Brisbane on the proviso I get there pronto. I did and I took the computer with me to give me something to do. I played Deus Ex for a few days and then I started getting pairs of vertical lines and heaps of lock-ups. Eventually, I discovered the lines fault was the videocard. I then purchased a new videocard, but it was back to the crashes and lock-ups. I purchased a CD drive and installed it. Whilst reading the instructions, I noticed it said the CD and the HDD should have separate IDE cables. The

machine I bought had one cable shared between the original CDRW and the HDD and the master connection (end) was plugged into the slaved CDRW. I bought an IDE cable from Dick Smith for \$16, plugged it in correctly and everything worked fine. I rang the shop and asked why they skimped on using only one IDE cable. They said they have done it with hundreds of machines and had no problems. I said all these problems are not my fault and he replied they were not his fault either. So, what do I do now? I am returning the video card and will hopefully get a replacement, which I now have no use for and is severely devalued. I have been buying and upgrading PCs regularly since 1984 and have not yet found a decent computer shop who wants to keep a customer.

Stephen J Little

It's astounding really how simple some of the stuff-ups can be. It's not just limited to the little two-bit PC retailers either, major chains like the now-defunct Osborne were also famous for massive SNAFUs causing pain and grief for a generation of users. My first 486SX Osborne was shipped with a Soundblaster Pro

card, but only SB 2 drivers. And the Western Digital graphics chip on the motherboard could run 256 colours in games, but not in Windows 3.1. Again, incorrect drivers. And let's not even talk about IRQ conflicts! Nowadays, of course, with smarter BIOSes and plug-and-play (dog of a system, it is) systems integrators have even fewer excuses for a bad setup.



One of these men is an idiot and the other is a computer salesman. Can you tell the difference?



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- Test your skill in 12 intense missions, including visitor rescue and stopping a dino rampage.
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bluetongue



Armobiles

Developer: Ganymede Technologies ■ Publisher: Ganymede Technologies ■ Distributor: TBA ■ Due: TBA

Hot-roddable death machines?

Have rally racers become serious all of a sudden? The maker of this title claims players will be called upon to use more tactical reasoning and not mere reflexes.

From the outset, Armobiles won't be just doing the rounds, it comes with a rather stimulating, if slightly Hollywood-scented, plot and a massive 70 missions to complete. The playability incentives involve high-tech battles against the AI using the sort of artillery you might see on Arnold Schwarzenegger in Back to the Future. Getting killed is a major part of the game.

Vegas or my backyard?

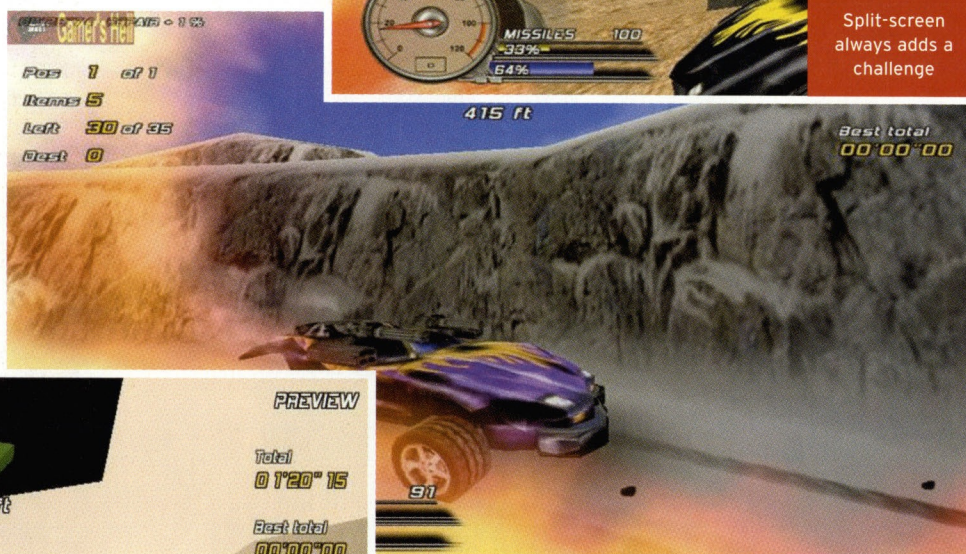
The futuristic plot and its heavy military shading will give way to some interesting and unconventional scenery in standard mission routes. This aspect alone will satisfy those longing to get off the beaten track. Some of the intrigue-sparking backdrops will include building innards, runways and submarine bases. As usual, trans-national locales will be available, ranging from snowy Alaska, the arid Nevada desert (perhaps a stop at Vegas?) and our own Aussie backyard during a downpour.

Some tricky obstacles will force you into some airborne manoeuvres, too. All these sound like a welcome break from the usual magnificent, yet somehow irrelevant scenery of other tyre-burning titles. If the graphics are balanced and well integrated, it may breathe just enough life to boost the spirit of the game.

Despite promises of stimulating environs, the game is expected to deliver a moderate visual complexity. Although, this may disappoint some, the majority of players relatively low-end machines should be pleased with the outcome.

Looks destructive

The game looks promising with action being complemented by the visuals, and not vice-versa. At each of the missions and training levels, there will be AI combatants packing their own firepower and changing their testosterone levels to match the player's own. The offensive road-hardware range will offer the usual bullet sprayers, rocket launchers and laser-guided munitions. Look out for the invisibility module to



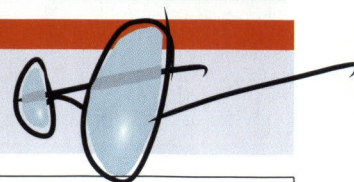
Why Armobiles deserves a 2nd look:

Quake action on wheels!

Intriguing backdrops for maximum ambience

Varied playable scenarios

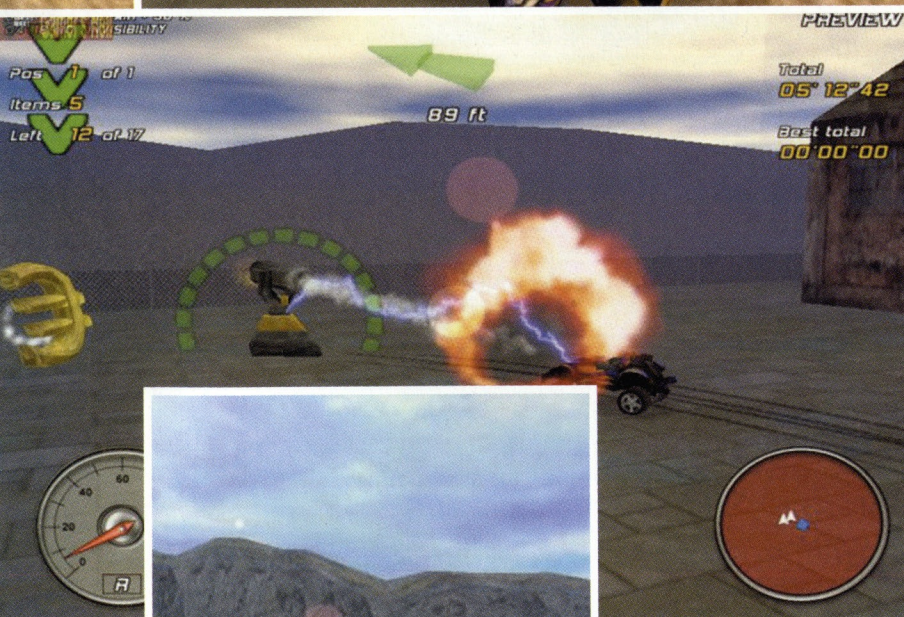
Manoeuvre your ride like never before





Smash anything that moves!

PREVIEW



Don't let yourself get bogged!

gain tactical supremacy in the game's futuristic setting.

As a cadet of the secret squad specialising in hazardous vehicular missions, you can train as it is scripted or jump into the Destruction Derby mode for some uplifting arena action with fellow cadets. There will also be modes tailored for stunt maniacs who can gain points by performing complex aerial feats. This option appears at the juncture when the game offers both LAN based multiplayer ability, single, or 'duet-style' split screen for two players.

So, if you are looking for a scenic and high-tech battle on four wheels, this gun 'n' run should satisfy a healthy bout of road rage.

Mabel Li

STAR TREK ELITE FORCE II



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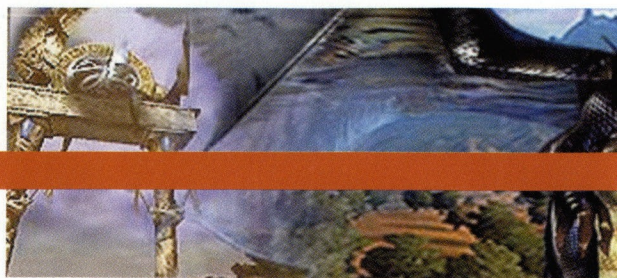
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The I of the Dragon

Developer: Primal Software ■ Publisher: Akella ■ Distributor: TBA ■ Due: Late 2003

"I, Unkh-Agor, have laid an egg for you."



Is this yet another two-legged RPG hero? Yes, but this one promises to give you a piece of the action right up there in the sky, complete with wings and a striking battle view onto ground-bound beasts.

It starts with Scharborr, the arch-nemesis of all things nice and peaceful, who returns from a rather nasty spell in prison and, naturally, wreaks revenge on those pesky humans in Nimoan. In an attempt to smote all things vaguely human, Scharborr's reckless anger encourages a monster stampede that has the human mages or Unkh-Agorites, desperate for a solution. The Unkh-Agorites summon you - a spirit born of a dragon egg - the prophesised hero who's best armour is that of a mighty dragon.

From the outset the game looks healthy enough to have an RPG core, plenty of action, side plots, a name derived from a Stephen King Novel, and an 'above it all' perspective captured by riding the Magic Carpet.

A spell for egos

This will be a game keen to stroke your ego from the beginning. It will take a particularly strong-willed human to resist the airborne majesty, heroism and divine freedom all Dragons share. True to its fantasy genre, there will be no shortage of fire-breathing vengeance in the heat of battles.

We have been assured that the playing mechanics also provide additional snooze-chasers where you are able to pick from 3 late-model dragons to drive, each with varying amounts of spells, firepower and

other hidden shenanigans. There's Annoth, the red one, who specialises in guided fire missiles; magical Barroth will have the gift of snatching and wielding spells like no other; and Morrogh who sails the middle path with acid-based attacks and plenty of spells at his disposal as well.

Fly and destroy

The I of the Dragon involves flying over vast landscapes which are tens of square kilometres full of dense highly-polygonal forests and villages. You also get to destroy offending critters to build up experience with new spells and higher stats. There will be cooperative action from human units, some creatures you can



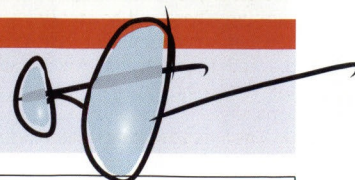
Why the I of the Dragon deserves a 2nd look:

Attacking from above with no complicated flying controls!

Take on the ego of a dragon

You can shape the landscape you fly over

Cinematic slow motion option!





Not all attacks from below are difficult to defend



The flight experience should be worth a look



summon with spells and rewards to reap from grateful towns people.

Accompanying the game's aerial viewpoint and its 'magical' plot, players will get to play some magnificent graphical cunning. There will be real-time Terramorphing applied to various parts of the landscape, which means you can truncate mountaintops and cause volcanic explosions and earthquakes.

There is also the added feature of

time control which can slow down the game and give you the option of fine-tuning it to your preferred speed. This is particularly convenient if you find pausing a game breaks the rhythm of play, or if you like to enjoy the spectacle of some cinematic slow-motion action.

Excited? Anticipate this titillating adventure through a dragon's eye view. Coming real soon from Russia with love.

Mabel Li

RISE OF NATIONS



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GAMENEWS

HEADLINES: AIAS Award night ■ UK Developer calls for assistance ■ Cyber war tactics ■ X2 Wolverine's Revenge ■ Product placement in games ■ Game Developers Conference 2003 ■ Another little publisher for US market

ALTERNATE REALITY GAMING



Now for something completely different...

It started with promotional antics for the film Artificial Intelligence: AI and now it's turned into a viable marketing strategy. What is it? It's what the punters call, Alternate Reality Gaming (ARG). Players are required to solve puzzles with clues obtained from advertising material, emails, faxes, videos and phone calls.

Although the film flopped at the box office, Artificial Intelligence captured the attention of curious people who noticed clues on promotional posters and trailers. These led them to Websites containing difficult puzzles concerned with the death of a fictional character called Evan Chan. Websites that were sometimes false, would appear and then disappear just as quickly, leaving players to run after a cyber trail littered with cryptic puzzles.

Forums were chock full of punters discussing puzzles and tactics, and also attempting to identify the developers who

were then nicknamed, the puppetmasters. A clever group of people, which later grew to 7,000, joined forces and began solving the problems together as a collective known as Cloudmakers. They still hadn't uncovered the identities of the developers, but at least their critical mass was producing desired results and in July 2001 they cracked all the codes.

Not soon after this, EA launch Majestic, which was in development when the promotional genius for Artificial Intelligence was only starting to pick up speed. Majestic was a subscription based online game that sent out clues by encroaching on players' real-lives and even once left threatening messages on their phones. As innovative as this seemed at the time, it either insufficiently engaged players or they were intimidated by the sudden encroachment in their real-lives and, sadly, Majestic bombed.

So, who were the puppetmasters? They were a Microsoft development team and

renowned SF and fantasy author, Sean Stewart, who were contracted to the promotional arm of the film's marketing department. The game was affectionately named, The Beast, and it was a quiet revolution in marketing and the unassuming birth of ARG, or beasting as it is also known in a monikor hat-tip to its origins. Other advertising campaigns to utilise the immersing qualities of ARG were to follow including Uncap the Ride for BMW and the most recent for the game, Tron.

But not all online games push for product sell, though some do provide prizes upon completion, such as Noahboddy which posts its clues on its web site and has an unspecified reward. Another game, Search4E, reportedly sent a box of books stamped with a strange address as a clue to a woman who visited the site. Currently, Chasing the Wish is one of the largest ARG sites with over 5,000 participants.

Like The Beast, these games often rely on the aggregated strength of online communities, but unlike MMORPGs, singleplayers often find themselves lost in a cryptic wilderness unless they attach themselves to a group. The real-world applications associated with ARG communities not only refer to problem solving skills, but also accepting a broader definition of storytelling, a concept that online enthusiasts state they have finally reclaimed from flashy graphics.

A fake Website for the Beast

Can a collection of gears and programs truly be said to be "alive"? Should machines be given "rights" at the expense of your family? Reasonable people can disagree on this crucial issue. What is not open to debate is that the current Mann Act, as written, is a deeply flawed and poorly thought-out piece of legislation. While its supporters are no doubt in a rush to correct what they see as an "injustice," the rest of us must be sure that any law which will fundamentally and irrevocably change the balance of political and social power in our nation has been put together with a great deal more thought. Whether you are "For" or "Against" the emancipation of AI's, you need to vote NO on the Mann Act Referendum.

AIAS AWARD NIGHT

EA conquers Las Vegas

The sixth annual US Interactive Achievement Awards presented by The Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences (AIAS) in the US voted the best games of 2002 in various categories and platforms. Electronic Arts bagged a slew of awards for BF1942 including both the Computer Game and Game of the Year.

EA also received nods for Medal of Honor: Allied Assault and Frontline, Madden NFL 2003, The Sims: Unleashed and Online and Lord of the Rings. Ubi Soft scored Outstanding Achievement in Gameplay Engineering for Splintercell and Blizzard Entertainment won the Computer Strategy Game of the Year for its Warcraft 3: Reign of Chaos. Rockstar and Infogrames didn't leave empty handed and took the trophies for Computer Action Game of the Year for Grand Theft Auto 3 and Computer Roleplaying Game of the Year for Neverwinter Nights, respectively.

The award ceremony, however, has its critics. Some industry observers accuse the AIAS awards as self-congratulatory pats on the back from a board of directors which comprises of representatives from EA, Ensemble Studios, Infogrames, Nintendo US, Sony US and Sierra Entertainment.



All's fair in love and war

PC AWARDS

EA:
Battlefield 1942
Game of the Year
Computer Game of the Year
Online Gameplay Game of the Year
Innovation in Computer Gaming
Medal of Honor: Frontline
Outstanding Achievement in Sound Design
Outstanding Achievement in Original Music Composition
Medal of Honor: Allied Assault
Computer First Person Action Game of the Year
Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers
Outstanding Achievement in Visual Engineering
The Sims Unleashed
Computer Simulation Game of the Year
The Sims Online
Massively Multiplayer / Persistent World Game of the Year
Madden NFL 2003
Computer Sports Game of the Year

Infogrames:
Neverwinter Nights
Computer Role Playing Game of the Year

Blizzard:
Warcraft 3: Reign of Chaos
Computer Strategy Game of the Year

Ubi Soft:
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell
Outstanding Achievement in Gameplay Engineering

Rockstar:
Grand Theft Auto 3
Computer Action Game of the Year



BIRTH OF HYBRID

Mother3D engine lives long and prospers

Vulcan Software, UK developers of the award winning Final Odyssey series for Amiga, is developing Hybrid, a 3D FPS about marauding aliens attacking human cargo ships.

In the same vein as Alien, the Tomari Corporation establishes a remote mining plant on Neptune's third moon, Neried. However, there has been no communication with Earth in over three months and Tomari is getting nervous. It orders resource and cargo ship, Navasota, nearing the end of its six-month voyage to Neptune, to investigate the mystery when, en route to the moon, it suddenly encounters an alien vessel. The alien craft attacks - it's intent unknown - and the Navasota must now contend with an injured crew and the ship's self-destruct mode triggered into action. The player will take on the role of Lieutenant Marek Hale and save the ship from imminent annihilation and then battle with hybrid aliens on Neried.

The game will be developed using Vulcan's own 3D-technology engine, Mother3D, which took four years to create and which will also feature heavily in other Vulcan PC games in the future. Vulcan director, Paul Carrington, is confident that Mother3D will produce a new breed of FPS.

"Stunning 3D visuals (will) provide

more than a mere backdrop to the game-play by offering extensive interactive possibilities. There will be countless ways to kill, evade or fool the enemy characters, who possess AI systems that allow them to use the interactivity of the environments to their own advantage", he said.

To achieve this, Vulcan is basing development on the higher end of the specs trail using nVidia's GeForce TI 4200 and a 1600 MHz CPU.

BYTE SIZE

WET LAPTOPS

Toshiba has released its prototype fuel cell for laptops that breaks down methanol and can provide up to 5 hours working time. Although the fuel cell is the size of a small brick, Toshiba hopes to modify this green energy source to the size of its cartridge, which is a little bigger than a mouse, by 2004. It currently holds 50cc of alcohol which, although great for the user and the environment, is not big enough to hold a tipple.



Up for a middy?

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PRODUCT PLACEMENT

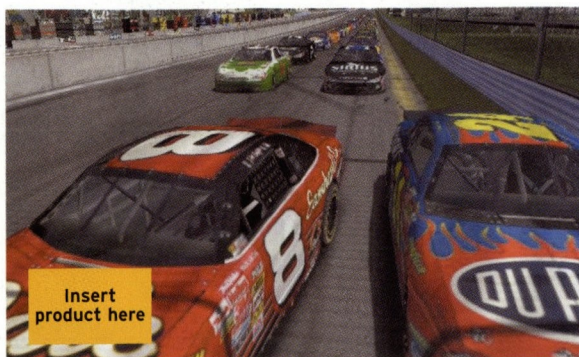
Hm, I suddenly feel like a Pepsi...

Product placement specialists, JAM International Partners Inc., and the University of Wisconsin are collaborating on a study to measure the effectiveness of product placement in games. It has been commissioned by three companies, which have not been publicised, to produce quantitative research that will lend weight in future deals between major brand companies and developers.

According to JAM International Partners Inc., companies that are eager to place their products in games have been

asking for research to verify the effectiveness of the medium, which many in the advertising industry consider is still in its infancy. Although this perception may be true when compared to other advertising media, the interest is far from small. The attraction of video gaming is growing at such a rapid rate independent technology research firm, Forrester Research, predicts that by 2005 advertising deals will bloom to an astounding (US)\$705million in the US alone.

Research has already begun and



preliminary results from the first phase of the study suggests that interviewed car racing players had a very high rate of product recall and were generally positive about brand placements in games. Further to this, a range of variables will be added to the study that will determine whether genre, platform and environment affect results.

BYTE SIZE

EUROPE RISING

Nielson Net Rating analysts believe broadband connection is the reason why nearly six-million Europeans visited online games sites ranging from MMORPGs to simple card games in January - nearly double the figure from the same time last year. Germany and France were the most enthusiastic online gamers followed by Holland and then the US.



NEED A HELPING HAND

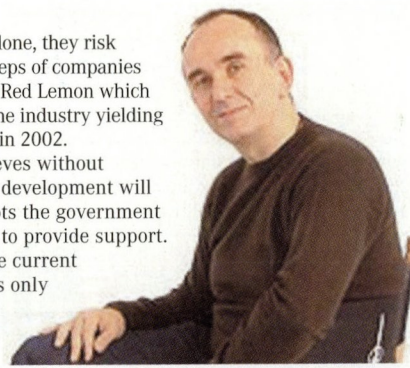
UK developer calls for assistance

Managing director of Lionhead Studios, Peter Molyneux, has suggested the UK government step in and financially fund smaller game companies as it does for filmmakers.

As the creator of the Black and White series and often referred to as the Stanley Kubrick of the gaming world, Molyneux's worry is justified. He believes the UK leads the world in developing innovative games, but sees independent developers struggling in an industry where many of the companies have banded together to form a critical mass in order to survive. However, if

developers do stand alone, they risk following in the footsteps of companies such as Crawfish and Red Lemon which closed shop, despite the industry yielding a whopping \$6billion in 2002.

Although he believes without government funding development will shift the US, he doubts the government is interested enough to provide support. He does still hope the current situation in the UK is only a part of the ebb and flow pattern of the industry.



X2 WOLVERINE'S REVENGE

Sabertooth, I am your father

Mark Hamill will be providing the voice of Wolverine who will be a modern day samurai warrior in the PC version of the X2 Wolverine's Revenge, which will hit our shelves in the third quarter of this year.

Developers have assured comic fans the game will follow the original storyline co-written by legend Larry Hama. They are also confident Mark Hamill will preserve Wolverine's raw and brooding energy. The game will also touch on Wolverine's origins and arch-nemesis, Sabertooth, will be making his annual Kill-Wolverine pilgrimage.

The PC version will be a direct port of the original Xbox with the only changes, as per usual, made to graphics resolution. The developers decided to copy the tried-and-true PC control setup with a few tweaks used in the game Spider-man: The Movie.



BYTE SIZE

REDUNDANT BOOTHS

Mobile phones have pushed the old pay phone on the road to extinction. In Japan, they have taken it a step further by using old pay phone stands for mobile phone chargers booths. Called The Yuki Charger, the user pays in coins for each ten-minute fast charge, which will hopefully provide an eight-hour stand-by. In the possible event you may not recognise the booth's purpose, they've thoughtfully made it to look like an oversized mobile phone.



湾岸 MIDNIGHT CLUB II

The Future Of Illegal Street Racing

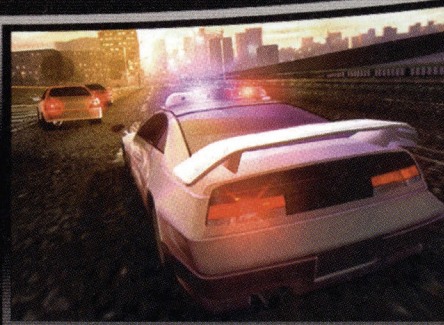
LOS ANGELES / PARIS / TOKYO



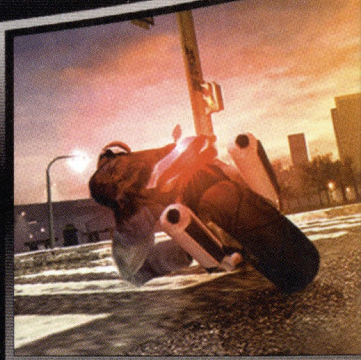
Meet the world's most notorious drivers on the streets of LA, Paris, and Tokyo.



Choose from the latest performance enhanced vehicles and compete to make a name for yourself.



There are no rules - drive anywhere in the city. Find the fastest route to win.



The Midnight Club is now open to motorbikes. Take advantage of the speed and control

"(An) insane urban racing experience... it's ultra-illegal stuff that you've dreamed of doing." - PSM DECEMBER 2002



PlayStation 2



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PICK A PUBLISHER

Tri Synergy gives the developers a chance

Games publisher, Tri Synergy, is attempting to bring back the balance of power to the relationship between publisher and developer by handing much of the credit given to publishers for successful games back to the developers.

Tri Synergy are so intent on maintaining their distribution and marketing only status that it's often hard to find their tiny logo on well received titles from Funcom, such as *Savage* and *Anarchy Online*.

Doubtlessly, most developers will welcome the kudos, but Tri Synergy has discovered most are not even aware they have the option of deciding how much control they can retain when signing with a publisher, believing that ownership of marketing and selling strategies have been transferred. Tri Synergy is so far providing an alternative for developers with completed games seeking specific distribution and public relations services.



STAR WARS: GALAXIES

Your lack of faith is disturbing

To prevent any further delays to the release of *Star Wars: Galaxies*, Sony Online and Verant have cut features from the game that has some industry commentators in the US comparing it to the *Everquest* debacle.

According to one of the beta testers, the cut features include Dark Jedi, playable classes, player built cities and rideable vehicles which had reminded the testers of *Everquest*'s disappointing attempt. This has Australian fans worried whether the situation will improve by the time the game hits our shores. Perhaps the *Star Wars: Galaxies* Special Edition lapel pins, pewter figurines, concept art book packaged in a polished black box will wipe the off the worried frowns from foreheads?

Take a good look, it may be a while before you see them again



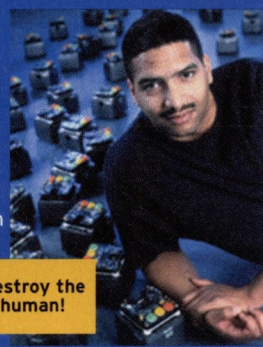
BYTE SIZE

BUGS WIN

The world's smallest self-contained autonomous robots have won the prestigious Lemelson-MIT Program Student Prize for inventiveness. Measuring 4.5-inches per side, the microrobots are programmed to mimic the behaviour of bees and accomplish individual tasks that support the collective goal of the

"swarm". The inventor hopes to use them to carry out real-world jobs too dangerous for humans and animals to perform, such as landmine detection and cleaning the PCPP office...

Destroy the human!



BYTE SIZE

RADIO TAG

96-bit Radio frequency ID chips have been inserted into consumer products like razor blades so companies and stores can keep a track of stock and prevent theft. Despite problems with radio wave interference, the chips by Sun and Motorola are already a success in England and trials are under way in the US.

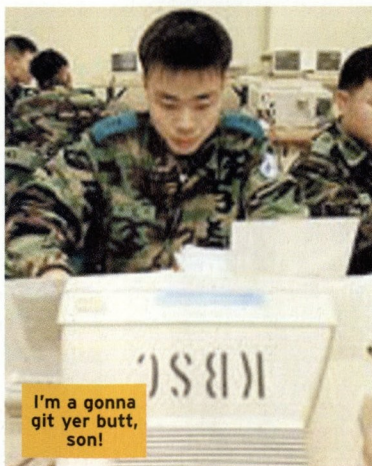


Now you have to hide it from both your mother and the supermarket

CYBER WAR TACTICS

Nothing like a LAN

As international diplomatic disasters continue to put the rest of the world on edge, South Korean and US troops prepare for possible combat by training with RTS games in month long drills.



I'm a gonna git yer butt, son!

South Korean and United States soldiers have been role playing as either North Korean or US troops at the Korean Battle Simulation Centre in Seoul and attempt to plot each other to their destruction. The Centre is a high-security building filled with PCs and wall-mounted monitors charting the progress of each team from casualties, what ground is lost or gained and the extent of damage to equipment.

Despite sounding like a LAN meet, retired US Army Lt. Col., Jude Shea, insists that this is not a video game, but an important exercise in strategy designed to seriously assist in training the soldiers for warfare.

Some of the tactics played in the RTS involve countermeasures to enemy attacks or full exercises such as a US and South Korean led assault on a beach backed by the carrier *Venison*.

Soldiers playing North Koreans assess spy reports and also develop strategies based on field intelligence and observation sources.

FORGOTTEN REALMS

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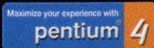
Requires the original Neverwinter Nights to play

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CROUCHING TIGER HIDDEN PC

Ubi Soft says it's not PC bound



Chop suey?
I'll give you
chop suey!



The imminent release of the PS2 version of Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon, which is already a year later than planned, will be the only one to hit the shelves later this year. Ubi Soft has confirmed the game will not be available on PC, though development for Gameboy Advanced has been approved.

The game, which is based on the Oscar award winning film by Ang Lee, promises to have similar fight sequences and graphics that impressed film audiences.

GDC 2003

From Russia with love

Despite the news that Ubi Soft is not developing a PC version of Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon (see above), the US Game Developers Conference 2003 has lifted the hopes of PC gamers with three promising titles from Russia. Developer K-D Lab had an RTS, which, at the time of the conference was still in the beginnings stages, featured 2.0 shaders and a breathtaking graphics terraforming engine. Called Perimeter, it is likely to be the first comprehensive DirectX 9 game to be developed. It also features a dynamic tessellation engine that displays the optimum number of polygons per frame, which can be as many as 1million. US gamers will be expecting in the third quarter this year, but Aussies will have to

wait a little bit longer.

The second game is a flight sim called Fair Strike by Russian G5 Software. The player pilots a hyper-realistic military helicopter and attacks terrorists in over 40 non-linear global missions. It gives the player the option to play in either arcade-style or simulation and also a multiplayer death mode. To maintain the realism, G5 had collaborated with military consultants to design the helicopters and buildings. The third Russian doll is the tactical 3D-team shooter called S.T.A.L.K.E.R. by Oblivion Lost. This flaunts impressive 100,000 polygons per frame and a powerful skeleton-based animation that uses motion-capture hardware to produce smooth character motion.



This will get
the tan
started

BYTE SIZE

MOBILE DEATH

Three men had died in Kenya, Africa, in an attempt to collect a mobile phone that had fallen down a public toilet pit. The lady, who had dropped the phone, offered a reward that was far above the average daily salary, but she and spectators became worried when the first man, who descended on a ladder didn't re-surface. A friend went down in search for him, but he also didn't come back up alive. The third man attempted, but because the fumes were so toxic, he only made it halfway down the ladder before he was overcome and passed out. The phone has still not been found.

BYTE SIZE

FAKE JOBS

Need a job? Beware of fake job listings, says TMP Worldwide who has emailed the warning to its users of Monster.com. As complaints about ID thieves continue to rise, TMP Worldwide cautioned users that thieves may masquerade as service providers emailing users to re-enter log-in names and passwords, giving them access to account details.



IDs taste
better than
maccas

BIG FUN

Another little publisher for US market

Strategy First has officially launched a new budget-conscious arm to its publishing division. Called Big City Games, it will publish games for the US market within between (US)\$10 - \$30 and will be stocked at major US retailers, such as Wal-Mart, Gamestop and Electronic Boutique.

The company plans to publish a wide variety of titles including children's, strategy, action adventure and sports. Already in this year's lineup are games Pet Soccer, Pet Racer, Indiana Jack, Bridge 3000, Chess 2003, Rocko's Quest, Space Haste 2 and FIM Speedway Grand Prix.

Strategy First was awarded the ninth position in the top 50 fastest growing technology companies for 2002 in Canada by Deloitte & Touche Canada.



vroom, vroom,
vroom!

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GAMECHASER

The flotsam and jetsam that deserves your attention **with Mabel Li**

GALACTIC CIVILISATIONS

No more lonely nights with 4X fun

Developer: Star Dock
Publisher: Strategy First
Distributor: TBA
Available: Q2 2003

This will be the remake of the simplistic Galactic Civilisations for OS/2. Stardock is gearing this full-blown 4X space number towards turn-based strategy fans who don't mind Trekkie influence in its game elements.

The game has a large explora map with plenty of astral phenomena for yielding bonus finds. There will be wealth of strategic switches to fiddle with while playing and ethical and political choices

made will impact the progress and direction of the game. Neighbouring races decide their stance towards the player's colonies based on similar ethical and political choices.

A multitude of factors will be involved towards success. Managing growing colonies is very much an integral part of the gameplay itself. Tech advances need to be carefully considered to enhance exploratory potential through space and relationships with the celestial neighbours. Influence points will have important diplomatic and resource ownership implications. And as usual, keep your colonies happy, so they vote you back into power!



ANACHRONOX

Weapons of mass modulation

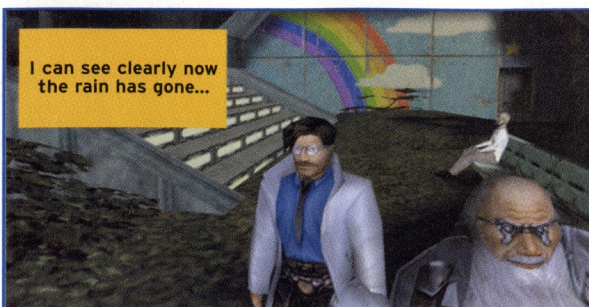
Developer: Ion Storm
Publisher: Eidos Interactive
Distributor: TBA
Available: June 2003

You play a band of accidental heroes who have embarked on a journey across the galaxy and have discovered a cache of powerful weapons left by a long dead alien race.

The team grows to seven controllable characters, amongst which you can direct three at a time into exploration and combat. Efforts like map exploration and information mining will be required to progress the plot.

What will really turn up the interactivity notch is the feature allowing players to make their own weapons. Apparently, the use of a "modular elementor weapon system" makes it possible to have up to 250 million possible weapon combinations!

Magical attacks will have accompanying graphical effects that are exaggerated and amusing to view. All the elements of the game will be incorporated with a turn-based battle system. Unravel galactic conspiracies and unlock any skills the characters gain through sub-challenges along the way.



BLACK 9

Saboteur for hire

Developer: Taldren
Publisher: Majesco Games
Distributor: TBA
Available: Q3 2003

You will begin the game by working for one of nine Illuminates in a world set in 2080 and soon get tangled up in their treacherous rivalry and endless conspiracies. The game will, essentially, be an RPG where the kind of character you pick and develop will determine the style of playing. Advances in skill level as you progress means you can better use nifty futuristic weapons, such as Nanotech Magic.

Each of the nine super powers will

send you on missions to sabotage the other. The secret operation grounds of the Illuminates are the mission locales, including the surfaces of Mars and the Moon. Drivable vehicles will also feature in certain missions.

There will be plenty of kills and rewards to be reaped in this futuristic fantasy title. Some of the Illuminates that will be employing you are the Genesis, My Private Money DGP, The Black Dragons and the quaint sounding, The Tea-Drinking Society.



ADAM BLASTER: ATOMIC ENFORCER

Bustin' free across the universe

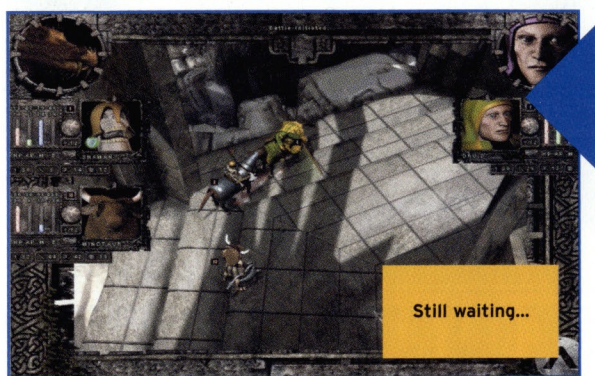
Developer: Star Dock
Publisher: Strategy First
Distributor: TBA
Available: Q2 2003

You are Adam Blaster, space-cop and trapped in a galactic prison colony suffering from amnesia. Unfortunately, everyone around you doesn't, so get ready for some serious anti-cop sentiment from robot guards, the warden and other inmates. You must break out, defeat the foes, and return to headquarters. It gets worse when you find out you've been framed for taking bribes to

release fugitives and now must turn into a renegade cop to track down the fugitives to prove your innocence.

Gameplay features travelling the Quad Galaxies tracking fugitives, and bringing them to justice. Landing on planets in each system, you must travel on foot to track the fugitives using an amazing array of weapons and technology to return them to headquarters - preferably alive; justice for them and a bounty for you.

In addition to this difficult task, the player must solve puzzles, navigate, and deal with the local creatures and vegetation on each system visited.



SCRAPLAND

Assist humans as a robot!

Developer: TBA
Publisher: Mercury Steam
Distributor: TBA
Available: 2004

In Scrapland, you are robot D-Tritus, who has assembled himself from junkyard parts in robo-tropolis, Chimera. Scrapland allows players to build custom spaceships for high-speed air combat sequences in a whodunnit murder mystery plot. The bigshots controlling Chimera, the mayor, police chief, bank director, newspaper magnate, and archbishop are murdered one by one and a human is suspected. Robots are afraid of humans, so the city is scared. D-Tritus plays cyber-politician and warrior in what promises to be a unique plot. Multiplayer is, of course, included, and allows players to customise their own vehicles. The game promises to be unusual with an open-ended architecture planned in its release in 2004.



EMPIRE OF MAGIC

Outsmart the enemy... eventually

Developer: Mayhem Studios
Publisher: Summitsoft Entertainment
Distributor: TBA
Available: May 2003

This game makes a comeback for turn-based RPGs. It is set to be a thinker's adventure with a difference. On the one hand, it's a straight forward objective-driven action, while on the other, it throws plenty of surprises along the way.

The storyline weaves with twists and turns and within its folds the AI enemies lurk about making it no easy feat. Enemies in the game tend to be extremely organised and can budget their moves with no mercy.

The 2D rendered graphics are from a peculiar top-down angle giving the settings a strange and almost disoriented perspective. Truncated buildings and

foliages may induce the right kind of mindset for players venturing into the hours with calculated moves against the enemy.

The game pace is still in need of improvement. At the time of writing, long waits, such as enemy side kicks to wild camels in the fields have to be tolerated as it appears everyone wants to have their 15 minutes of fame. Expect the plot to be dragged out before it gets interesting.



PORT ROYALE

Yarr, me hearties!

Developer: Ascaron GmbH
Publisher: Tri Synergy
Distributor: TBA
Available: Q2 2003

Get busy with this multiplayer RTS title set on the Carribeans. Players will side with a nation of choice and begin empire building. A large part of the game will be simulation and management, while the focus is on interaction between players. Up to eight people can play to

contend for supremacy in the Carribeans. Activities of engagement include trading, sea battles, expeditions, voyages, and treasure hunts in an open ended environment. You are also given the choice to either fare the waters as a pirate or trader. Look out for this Sim-like game!



TECHCHASER

All the bits that we had to cram in at the last moment **with Asher Moses**

RD7-CA COOLING AFTER

Price: \$39

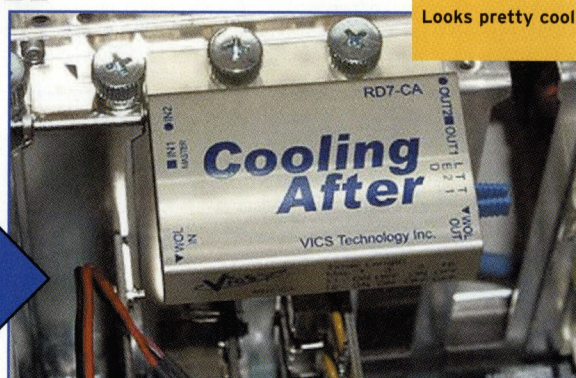
Distributor: PCRange

Phone: (08) 8322 9544

An interesting little cooling product was recently brought to our attention - the RD7-CA Cooling After from Taiwan manufacturer IOSS International. Essentially, this device is designed to keep the fan on your CPU cooler running for a period of time after you've shut down your PC. What's the point of that, you ask? Well, IOSS International seem to think heat produced by your CPU increases directly after shut

down, and this is where the RD7-CA comes in to protect electrical components from damage.

However, even the most scientifically challenged amongst us can work out this is impossible because after shutdown electrical current ceases to be pumped into the CPU. If your heatsink does feel a little hot, then that's because heat has spread through it after turning off the fan, but extra heat would not have been generated. So, if the thought of purchasing one of these devices has ever crossed your mind, our advice would be to spend that \$39 on something a little more useful.



Looks pretty cool

PC TACHOMETER

Price: \$119

Distributor: PCCaseGear

Phone: (03) 9568 0932

New to the weird and wacky mod category, the PC Tachometer provides yet another method of graphing CPU utilisation - on a tachometer! Using a custom software application (designed for use in Windows NT/2000/XP), the tachometer kit will accurately graph your CPU utilisation on the car tachometer, redlining at nearly 8000rpm under full load. Although it requires quite a bit of spare space because it won't fit on a single drive bay cover, and is fairly expensive at \$119, it's certainly worth it for the geek who just has to have it all.



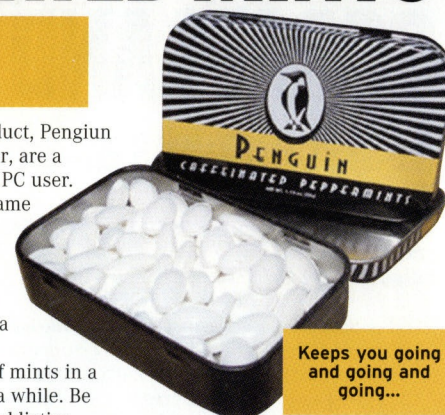
CAFFEINATED MINTS

Price: \$7

Distributor: PCCaseGear

Phone: (03) 9568 0932

Clearly not a hardware product, Penguin Caffeinated mints, however, are a must-have for any serious PC user. The mints enable you to game for days on end allowing you to forgo sleep. Sure, a few litres of Jolt Cola could provide a similar effect - if you want to rush to the bathroom every five minutes! At a price of \$7, they may seem quite expensive, but there are plenty of mints in a tin and should last you for quite a while. Be warned, though - they're bloody addictive.



Keeps you going and going and going...

Price: 36.30
Distributor: AusPCMarket
Phone: (02) 9746 0900

DUAL BUBBLE LIGHT KIT

The modding industry is currently on fire with literally hundreds of companies looking at grabbing a piece of the enthusiast pie. Innovation can be seen left, right and centre, with manufacturers forever coming up with new ways of making your PC look flash in the hope of gaining vital market share. The latest in PC lighting trickery is the dual bubble light kit, featuring two LED-lit 6" lights filled with stationary bubbles, giving a very neat "liquid" effect, indeed. If you feel the need to add some spice to your PC, then light kits are certainly a great way to do it - especially if you're planning on coupling them with a flashy nice new window mod.



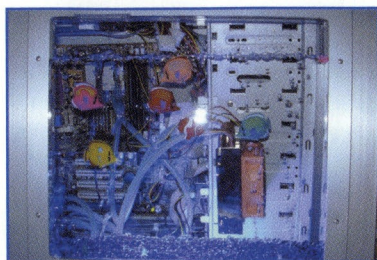
So pretty, so very, very pretty

RATPADZGS

Price: \$29
Distributor: PCCaseGear
Phone: (03) 9568 0932

Although hard to come by on the Australian market, the RatpadzGS has been long regarded as the cream of the mousing surface crop. Since the pad's initial release, its manufacturer has had access to a wealth of constructive criticism and, like any right-minded company, has since gone and made those changes the majority of gamers had suggested. The Ratpadz's surface is now even slicker than before, has a ribbed structure making it both lighter and stronger, and a new feature dubbed, Deskgrip, which basically forces the sides of the pad to dig into the desk as pressure is applied to the centre. Go forth and purchase one before the shelves empty!

Feels good and looks good - like a real rat!



LIAN-LI AQUA PANEL

Price: \$149
Distributor: Anyware
Phone: (02) 9879 5788

It's not cool to simply have a plain old window kit cut into the side of your case, anymore. Nope, now modders and manufacturers are taking it one step further with the Lian-Li aquarium panel. The aquarium panel has been designed specifically to fit Lian-Li mid-tower cases and includes the side panel itself, plastic fish and gravel, an air pump, a cold cathode (green or blue) and a selector switch mounted in an expansion cover plate. You'll obviously need to provide your own water, but as you can see from the image, the end result is very stylish, indeed, and a nice touch to any Lian-Li case. Too bad it can only fit mid-tower models, but, hopefully, this will change in the near future.

LIAN-LI MINIITX 402A

Price: \$213
Distributor: AusPCMarket
Phone: (02) 9746 0900

Looking for a case to house your DIY home entertainment system? Well, the Lian-Li MiniITX 402A, although quite expensive, may be just what you're after. Measuring in at just 210x240x340mm (WHD) and completely constructed from aluminium, it's obvious Lian-Li has created this case with a home entertainment/DVD box in mind. Furthermore, the inclusion of a single 3.5" drive bay, as well as dual 5.25" bays, should prove to be more than sufficient for this purpose. Also, the handy removable motherboard tray and front ports make it very convenient to work with. If only it were less expensive!

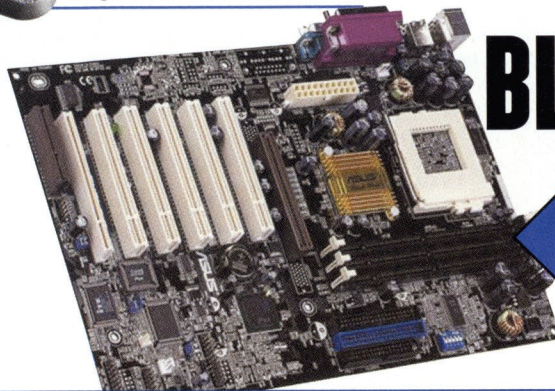


For the home entertainer!

ASUS P4PE BLACK PEARL

Price: \$349.80
Distributor: TechBuy
Phone: (02) 9648 1818

Asus's latest motherboard based on the i845PE chipset for the Pentium 4, the P4PE Black Pearl, features a sexy black PCB, ADI 6-channel 3D audio, DDR333 support (max 2GB), 6 PCI slots, 4 USB 2.0 ports and a 10/100 LAN port. Furthermore, it also supports a vast array of overclocking options in the BIOS and comes with a free 32MB USB flash disk, rounded cables, WinDVD suite and a silent 360-degree rotating heatsink for the northbridge. This is a must have collectors item for hardware enthusiasts.



XS-DRIVE II

Price: \$220
Distributor: AusPCMarket
Phone: (02) 9746 0900

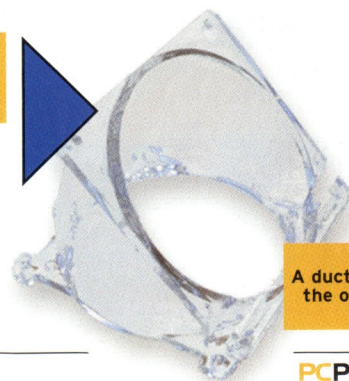
If you work with a number of different storage mediums, you've probably experienced the inconvenience of having multiple card readers scattered across your desk, as well as the tedious task of constantly swapping them because you have a limited number of ports on your motherboard. Enter the XS-Drive II. This handy USB 2.0 device supports almost every portable storage medium out there: Compact Flash I & II, SmartMedia Card (SM), SecureDigital Card (SD), MultiMedia Card (MMC), Memory Stick, Memory Stick Pro, IBM Microdrive and XD Picture cards. Although the XS-Drive is obviously not for everyone, if you find yourself working with multiple storage mediums on a regular basis, the convenience and value for money is well worth it.



THERMALTAKE DUCTING MOD

Price: \$22
Distributor: Anyware
Phone: (02) 9879 5788

ThermalTake is a handy plastic ducting mod designed to fit in between your heatsink and fan and is touted to direct air more efficiently than the traditional 'heatsink directly on top of fan' design. The mod is designed to be attached to an 80x80mm fan and is said to eliminate air turbulence, thus allowing cool air to spread even further throughout the heatsink and specifically its centre. If you're an overclocker you should definitely give the ThermalTake Ducting Mod a second look.



A ducting mod for the overclocker

3DTECHNEWS

Specialist news for the heart of every gaming PC with **Andrew Calvin**

A modern PC is made up of a dozen components, each of which can have a profound effect on the performance of your games. But no component is as vital to the gamer as the videocard. Each month, 3D Tech News will bring you the latest developments in graphics technology. A picture is worth a thousand words!

GEFORCE FX UPDATE

The force is with us once more, so what's the big deal?

Sometimes an article about improvements in graphics technology can be a bit esoteric, but there's now a good reason to pay attention with the release of nVIDIA's GeForce FX. While we'll focus on nVIDIA this month, we'll be taking a long look at its competitors over the next few issues.

nVIDIA is one of the top two graphics chipset manufacturers in the world. In ten years it has become a powerhouse of consumer and professional graphics. Its chips are found in Macintoshes, the Xbox, workstations, laptops and PCs. Its latest offering for the desktop and laptop is the GeForce FX, one of the

fastest (and loudest) graphics cards aimed at the consumer market. At the moment, it comes in three flavours, the 5200, 5600 and 5800 and all support DirectX 9. The main differences are the 5200 and 5600 don't have Intellisample Technology, and the 5200 also lacks DDR-II memory.

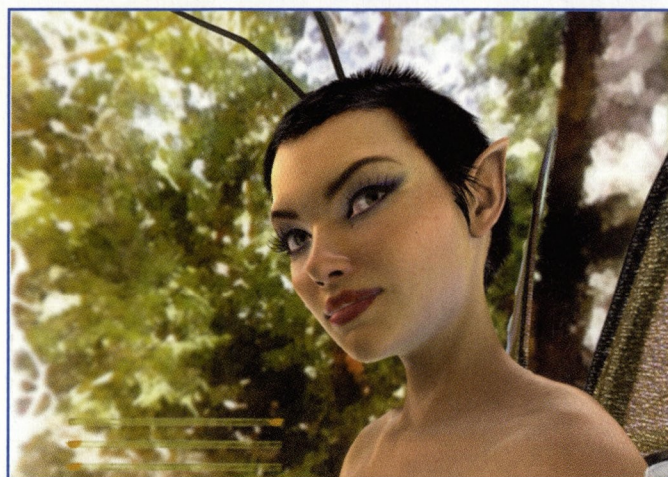
New anti-aliasing

Intellisample Technology is a beefed up version of anti-aliasing, raising the bar from 4x to 6x. Anti-aliasing makes lines on the screen appear smoother and straighter, making pictures appear more realistic and text more readable. Everything from a black and white .tif image to a 3D game can

benefit from anti-aliasing, but it takes considerable processing power to do it. nVIDIA claims the FX can anti-alias at various rates without any effect on performance and frame rate, which certainly wasn't the case on the GeForce3 or 4. In addition, the technology apparently improves anisotropic filtering. AF is useful when a textured surface (eg, the surface of a 3D object, such as a tank) is rotated, ensuring the texture doesn't distort.

DDR-2 refers to the memory used on the graphics board. Although the 5600 has 256MB of RAM, the top-end 5800 has 128MB of faster DDR-2 RAM, which operates at 1GHz. The lower amount of memory won't affect the 5800 for the foreseeable future, since most games don't even make full use of 64MB at the moment.

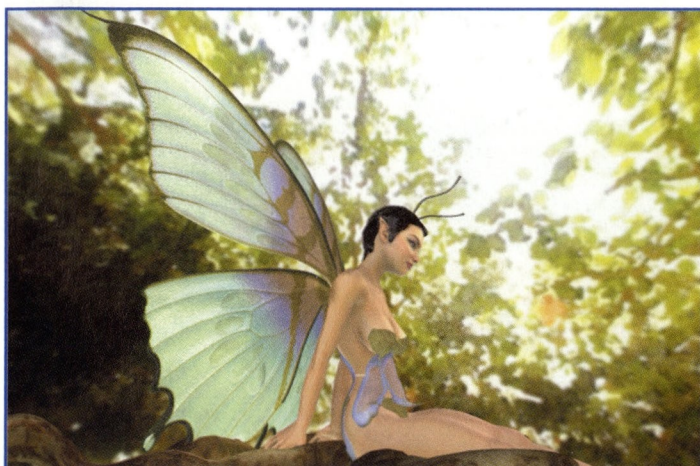
The features common to the FX family are CineFX Engine, nView Technology and AGP 8x. The CineFX Engine is compatible with OpenGL, DirectX 9 pixel shader 2.0+ and DirectX 9. vertex shader 2.0+. These shaders are designed to allow effects, such as Shrek winking or frowning, without a wall of 3D renderers going crazy. nVIDIA showcases it with an improbably shaped pixie named Dawn who can smile and wiggle her ears. Instead of needing to make several passes at rendering hair



FRAME BUFFER

IT'S A WONDER

ATI has released the All-In-Wonder 9000 Pro on 31 March 2003, which offers 3D graphics with built in TV and video recording for a mere US\$199. The card uses pixel shaders to smooth out blocky bits from the incoming video stream. Based on the 9000 Pro card with 64 MB of DDR RAM and a PAL/NTSC tuner, it looks like a pretty smooth solution for the cramped office or bedroom! It's based on the RV250 core, which is a "value" rather than performance component, but has full DirectX 8.1 compliance. Although unfortunately, in many other respects, it is little, or no, different to the R200 cored processors.

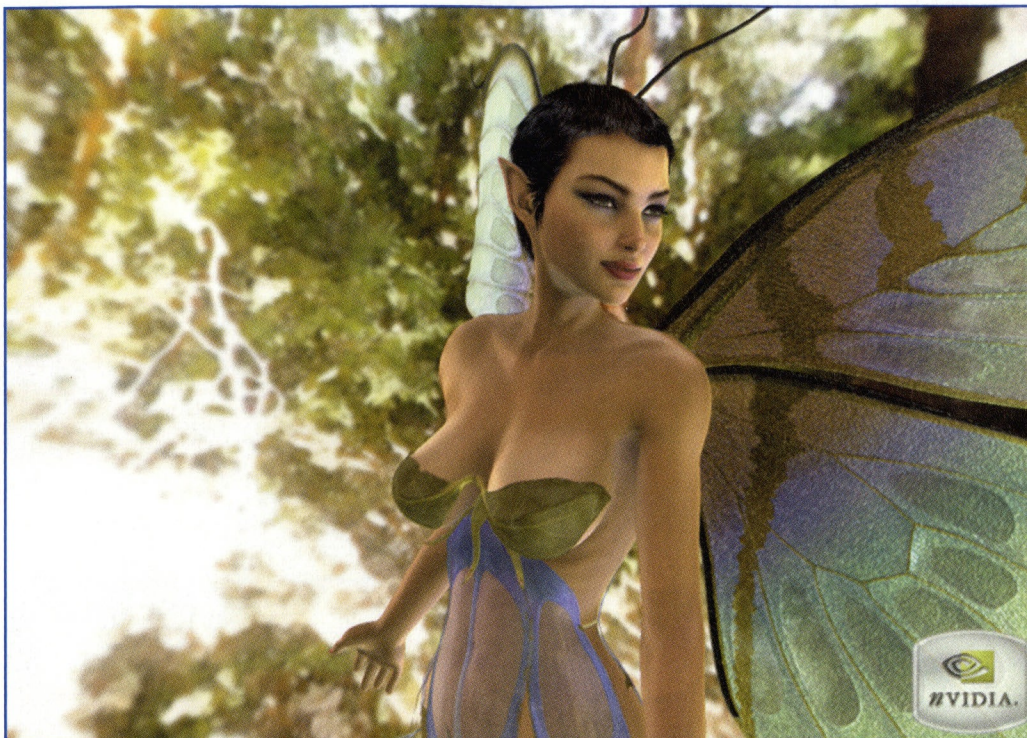


FRAME BUFFER

DRIVE ON

On 27 March 2003, nVIDIA released version 43.45 of the Detonator unified driver. Notable is the nView 2.0 software, which enhances management of your cards and monitors. At the time of writing, there was only one English language benchmark available to compare with previous versions, and it suggested a small performance gain with no effect on stability.





FRAME BUFFER

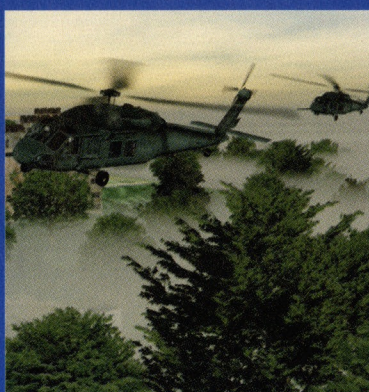
GEFORCE3 IS BACK!

The GeForce3 Ti200 is a great card, with capabilities that the GeForce4MX series doesn't have. Albatron has decided to keep the Ti200 alive by introducing the Ti200 Turbo series. The main specs haven't changed much from the original version, but a combination of small improvements should add up to some cheap, but fast cards. Remember, this class of card is DirectX 8.1 compliant with hi-res anti-aliasing, and can run at 2048x1536 @ 75 Hz, so it's no slouch. The Turbo has AGP 4x with 3.6ns memory, faster than the 4 or 5ns memory used by most other manufacturers. It also runs (like a number of others) with an engine clock of 200MHz, up from the original 175MHz, but doesn't waste money by piling in 128MB of DDR RAM, staying with 64MB. There don't seem to be any reviews out there, but it seems good value, since the GeForce4 MX isn't much more than a beefed up GeForce2.

FRAME BUFFER

WAR GOES 3D!

The USA ABC News has been using 3D flyovers in their reports on the Iraq war. This technology is from Evans & Sutherland, who build 3D simulators, image generators and projection systems. These projection systems range from large format movies (similar to Imax) to headtracked systems, where the system economises by tracking the user's point of view and displaying just enough to fill his field of vision, but covering the full 360 degrees.



movement, facial movement and trees waving in the breeze, this engine allows a programmer to render them all in one go. This means more movement in a given frame, which translates to richer and more realistic on-screen environments.

Wide pipes

While AGP8x sounds pretty impressive, and 2.1 GB/sec of data is a fair old bandwidth, there are quite a few cards out there that support it. However, we're likely to see PCI Express supersede the whole AGP thing, so we might not get too excited about 8x. Of course, you'll need a motherboard that supports AGP 8x, so remember to factor the cost in when looking to get the most out of an FX card.

nView technology is a bit more interesting, in that it allows you to have multiple monitors running off the one card. The Asus V9900 Ultra is an example of a card with two outputs, one of which being a digital output but with a VGA adapter thrown in. Its

maximum display mode is 2048x1536 at 85Hz. Even if you only have a single monitor, you can run multiple desktops and a few other tricks you might find useful. However, it's multiple monitors that are cool; if you haven't tried it, you



NVIDIA

should rush out and buy a TNT2 card right now for your spare 15" monitor. It's great for parking the email and instant messenger!

Get mobile

The mobile version of the FX is the GeForceFX Go. It comes in Go5200 and Go5600 versions with similar variations to the desktop version. nVIDIA has paid attention to battery life, DVD and video playback and controls to compensate for varying lighting conditions notebook users often face. Battery life is conserved by offering three performance settings, depending on whether you're on a flight to Canada or plugged in and gaming. Depending on the software provided by the card manufacturer,

you'll see dynamic adjustment of power usage according to how you're using your laptop, as well as manual adjustment. Since a lot of people seem to like watching DVDs on their laptops, there's a built in hardware MPEG2 decoder. That combined with a 1.575 volt power requirement and good buffering off the disc, you should be able to watch your film fine.

Big guns

The last member of the family is the QuadroFX, which has the 1000 and 2000 models. These are designed for CAD and 3D modelling users, and won't be as good for gaming as the desktop versions. Let's face it, Ghost Recon with 16x full-scene antialiasing at 3840 x 2400 would just be too much to brag about. You also probably don't own two 21" digital monitors either.

Worth it?

Of course, ATI's Radeon 9700 Pro is a worthy contender against the FX, and we'll take a look at that soon. In the meantime, it's worth noting that the FX has been described as one of the most unpleasantly noisy cards of all time. Some report not only is the variable speed fan noisy, it also "pulsates" at low speed due to the way the speed is controlled. It also takes up a PCI slot next to the AGP port to help cool the monster.

FRAME BUFFER

3D HEDGEHOGS?

It's been reported Sega has demonstrated a 3D monitor that doesn't need any eyewear and has a wide viewing angle (www.beyond3d.com/index.php#news5125). However, since the demo was on a 42" plasma monitor you may not be trying this at home anytime soon. Sega used the TriDefTM Transformer, which is part of the same family Imax uses to turn 2D films into 3D. Although its release is some time off, I'm looking forward to playing Battlefield 1942 in 3D!



VIRUSWATCH

With Stuart and Andrew Calvin

VBS_GROUCH.A

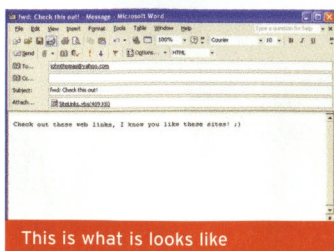
Got Virus? Write to us at
viruswatch@pcpowerplay.com.au for some
 sweet sweet relief...

A nasty little number that is ruining all your relationships

Q Dear Virus Watch,
 I now seem to have no friends; even my relatives are cross with me. I have a gazillion emails from people saying my PC is infected with a virus, but I also have a bazillion emails from people saying that pr0n sites are now free????!! All my friends tell me I have bad breath and I'm not welcome at my local LAN sMASH. It all started when I got an email from a good mate of mine saying "Hello, Here is that file that everyone was asking me for. Don't let anyone else see it, please, because it contains some pretty naughty stuff ;) " It had an attachment "SiteLinks". What tha?! I opened it and things just got worse because he said he DIDN'T send it to me?! There is a file in my KaZaA folder "1000 Porn Sites" which I know I didn't put there. What has happened? Can I fix it?
 PS: I have used my work PC, so you don't get infected.

Mother OF GoD

A Dear MOG,
 I probably won't ever get infected, but thanks anyway for the consideration. This virus, although a newbie, is just a simple Visual Basic script file that you execute, one way or another, on your own PC. If you're on a broadband connection you're gonna eat up a lotta allowance just sending and receiving this crap from other infected users. Such is the nature of mass-mailers. As someone who chews through a GIG every month just surfing and mailing, my heart goes out to you... sort of. Despite the apparent origin of your problem, many viruses actually originate from an IT Guru wannabe or some fool who's just learnt "hello world" in VB 101 and knows how



This is what it looks like

Internet Relays work. It seems to be too sophisticated to be described as 'kiddy script'. The origin is still unknown, but the distribution and damage potential of this worm is considered to be very high. If this virus really kicks off, no doubt, we'll learn of its maker. It came from a friend... where do you get it? The most common way to catch Grouch, that is, to infect your PC, is to run an infected executable file (.vbs, .exe, .scr, .com and so on) you've downloaded or that has been emailed to you. The latter is more likely, as it does mass-mailings as part of its payload. The average punter follows the instructions to their cost. DON'T run executable attachments ANYONE emails to you. If you need a file, download it from a reputable web site. Like all worm mass-mailers, it spreads popularly from other people's emails, but it will most likely first begin from another Internet source. It can propagate via Internet Relay Chat (which I frequent often!) and popular peer-to-peer file sharing networks like KaZaA. It also infects the MS Word global template, so it executes every time a document is opened or closed in Word. To propagate via email, it sends a copy of itself to addresses found in the Microsoft Outlook address book. It sends email with the following details:

Subject: <fwd:> Check this out
Message body: Check out these web links, I know you like these sites! ;)
Attachment: SiteLinks.vbs
Subject: <fwd:> The File
Message body: Hello, Here is the file everyone was asking me for. Don't let anyone else see it, please, because it contains some pretty naughty stuff ;)
Attachment: SiteLinks.vbs
Subject: <fwd:> Readme File
Message body: Hello, I'm running a bit late. Just read the Readme file for more information. <Computer Name>
Attachment: Readme.vbs
 On the system date, May 9, it will send email with the following specific format:
Subject: Fwd: Free Music!
Message body: Hello! Go to these sites I'm sending to you now. You can get basically any music file or Music video file that you want! Enjoy!

TREND MICRO PC-cillin TOP 10

These ones are going around. Keep an eye for them and make sure you're protected:

- 1. WORM_YAHA.K**
 Destructive Worm: Self-powered mail mailer; nuisance value and Internet bandwidth choker.
- 2. WORM_KLEZ.H**
 Destructive Worm: Infects via email attachments. Self-powered mass-mailer
- 3. PE_PARITE.A**
 Non-destructive File Infector Virus: Infects .EXE and .SCR files and increases their size.
- 4. PE_ELKERN.D**
 Non-destructive File Infector: Infects .EXE and .SCR files and increases their size.
- 5. WORM_LIRVA.A**
 Non Destructive Worm: a mass-mailing worm propagates via email, mapped network-shared drives, IRC, ICQ and KaZaA Peer-to-Peer file sharing
- 6. PE_NIMDA.A-O**
 Destructive Worm: shares your local drives to compromise the security of your file system.
- 7. VBS_REDLOF.A**
 Non-destructive VB Script: infects Outlook to propagate and choke bandwidth
- 8. PE_SPACES.1445**
 Destructive File Infector: modifies the system MBR (Master Boot Record) and halts execution. The modified MBR leaves system drives unbootable.
- 9. PE_MAGISTR.B**
 Destructive File Infector: This destructive variant trashes the Hard Drive and deletes certain files.
- 10. PE_NIMDA.E**
 Destructive Worm: fast-spreading file infector that arrives via email, as an attachment called SAMPLE.EXE



<ComputerName>

Attachment: Mp3Sites.vbs.

It deletes each message as they are sent. This worm keeps a list of all email addresses that it has mailed to in the following registry key:

HKEY_CURRENT_USER\Software\Ze d/[rRlf]Grouch\1.0\Outlook\RecordCo ntracts\

Peer-to-Peer Propagation

Grouch drops the following files in shared folder of known file sharing utilities:

1000 Porn Sites.vbs

Hacking made easy.vbs

How to make a virus.vbs

Hot Links.vbs

How to make a bomb.vbs

It drops the files in the following KaZaA, KaZaA Lite, Bearshare, EDonkey2000, Morpheus, Grokster, and ICQ folders:

%Program files%\KaZaA\My Shared Folder

C:\KaZaA\My Shared Folder

C:\My Downloads

%Program files%\KaZaA Lite\My Shared Folder

%Program files%\Bearshare\Shared

%Program files%\Edonkey2000

%Program files%\Morpheus\My Shared Folder

%Program files%\Grokster\My Grokster

%Program files%\ICQ\Shared Files

(Note: %Program files% is the Program files folder, which is usually C:\Program files). It also drops the files in any "Saved Document" folder in all drives, if this folder exists.

Word Infection and IRC Propagation

Upon execution, this Visual Basic script worm checks if it has already infected the Microsoft Word global template, Normal.dot, by checking for the existence of the following registry key: HKEY_CURRENT_USER\Software\Ze d/[rRlf]Grouch\1.0\NormalTemplate If it has not, it opens Microsoft Word and writes its code to the template, allowing it to execute every time a document is opened or closed in Microsoft Word. It also drops the file WinGrc32.dll in the Windows system folder and disables the following Microsoft Word features:

- Macro virus protection
- "Save to Normal Template" prompt
- Screen updating during infection
- ESC key to prevent attempts of stopping infection
- Error messages

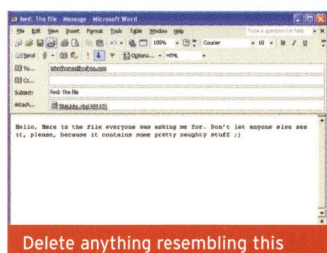
Hiding the Macro menu

If the worm is executed upon closing or opening of Word documents, it searches for mIRC and PIRCH script files (.INI). It attempts to infect these files so it gets distributed, via DCC, to other users connected to the same IRC channel. These executable infected attachments can automatically execute (without a user opening it) on recipient machines with unpatched Internet Explorer 5.01 and 5.5, since the worm email is constructed to contain an exploit on the known vulnerability Automatic

Execution of Embedded MIME type. You just need to view the email for the worm to infect your machine!

What does it do??

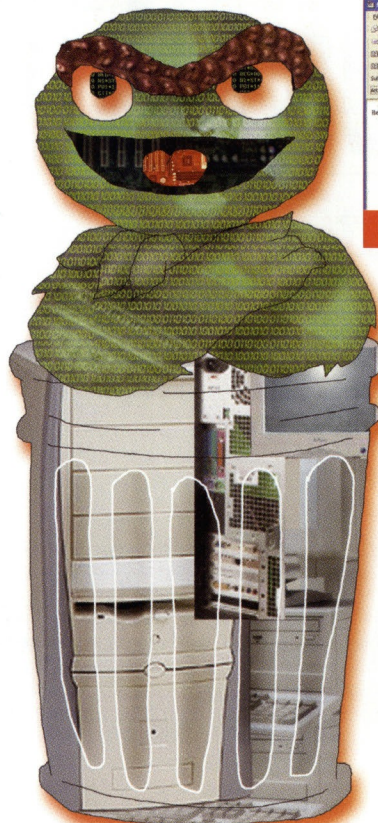
This worm creates the following registry entry so that it executes at every Windows startup: HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\Software\Mic rosoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Run.MS Grc32 = Wscript.exe %System%\MSGrc32.vbs %1 (Note: %System% is the Windows system folder, which is usually C:\Windows\System on Windows 9x and ME, C:\WINNT\System32 on Windows NT and 2000, or C:\Windows\System32 on Windows XP). It also drops a copy of itself with a random file name in the Windows startup folder. Aside from its mass-mailing feature for propagation and further local file infection, this worm, which runs on Windows 95, 98, ME, NT, 2000, and XP, attempts to execute an ineffective payload on May 9 on systems running Windows XP. The first payload will delete files on Windows XP with a Trigger Date of 9 May.



It tries, but fails to delete all files and folders from the current drive. Payload 2 will attempt to display a message on Windows XP: "Windows XP now has permanent errors". To delete the files, it drops a batch file that executes the "deltree" command to delete all files and folders in the current drive. However, since deltree is not a batch command supported under Windows XP, a corresponding executable, DELTREE.EXE, has to exist for the batch file to successfully delete the files. As Mother of God has bemoaned, the worst thing at the moment is the high-nuisance, mass-mailing feature. Sending "naughty links" to your mother would be a ragged affair indeed!

What's the antidote?

Like most viruses, the best way to fix it, is to not get it. Install anti-virus software and check for pattern file updates every day. If you can schedule update checks daily, make sure you do it. Most online and large organisations check for new patterns and engines every hour. But if you do get infected, what can you do? Most of the anti-virus vendors offer detailed instructions and even downloads from their web sites to clean PCs. If you're game or don't have access to an anti-virus program you can edit the Windows Registry: Removing Autostart Entries from the Registry Removing autostart entries from the registry prevents the malware from



executing during startup. Open Registry Editor. To do this, click Start>Run, type REGEDIT, then press Enter.

In the left panel, double-click the following:

HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE>Software>Microsoft>Windows>CurrentVersion>Run

In the right panel, locate and delete the entry:

MSGrc32 = "Wscript.exe %System%\MSGrc32.vbs %1" (Note: %System% is the Windows system folder, which is usually C:\Windows\System on Windows 9x and ME, C:\WINNT\System32 on Windows NT and 2000, or C:\Windows\System32 on Windows XP.)

Close Registry Editor.

Macro Virus Protection in Microsoft Word

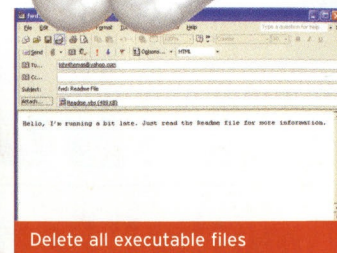
For Microsoft Word 97:

Open Microsoft Word 97. Click Start>Programs then click the appropriate link to Word 97. If no document is open, click File>New... Click on Tools>Options... Click on the General tab. Select the option: Macro virus protection Click OK.

For Microsoft Word 2000:

Open Microsoft Word 2000. Click Start>Programs then click the appropriate link to MS Word. Click Tools then point to Macro. Click Security... Select High then click OK.

Windows Millennium Edition and Windows XP



These have a feature known as System Restore, which creates backups of certain files in the _Restore folder. The System Restore feature usually backs up files with .EXE or .COM extensions, which may include infected files and malware programs. Files in the _Restore folder are protected and can only be accessed using System Restore. This feature must be disabled first before an antivirus program can access and clean these files. The following procedure disables the System Restore feature:

For Windows Me

Right-click the My Computer icon on the Desktop and click Properties. Click the Performance tab. Click the File System button. Click the Troubleshooting tab.

Select Disable System Restore.

Click Apply > Close > Close.

When prompted to restart, click Yes.

Press F8 while the system restarts.

Choose Safe Mode then hit Enter key.

After your system has restarted, continue with the scan/clean process. Files under the _Restore folder can now be deleted. Re-enable System Restore by clearing Disable System Restore and restarting your system normally.

For Windows XP

Log on as Administrator.

Right-click the My Computer icon on the desktop and click Properties.

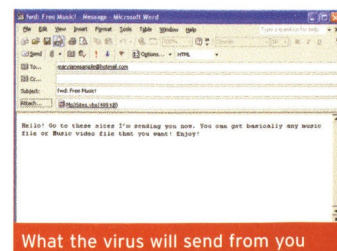
Click the System Restore tab.

Select Turn off System Restore.

Click Apply > Yes > OK.

Continue with the scan/clean process.

Files under the _Restore folder can now be deleted. Re-enable System Restore by clearing Turn off System Restore. The Microsoft Windows Update feature is now greatly improved and easier to use. As a security measure all browsers should be updated to the latest version or alternatively simply install the security patches offered by MS. A broadband connection helps and is a good way to use up unused allowance just prior to your ISP plan anniversary.



A NEW REALITY PRODUCTION

Timothy C Best



Let's skip forward a few years: I check my headset as I load up the game and hope my sweat doesn't short my face out. I've been so nervous I've actually written down some phrases in case I get into trouble or go blank - this is the money shot, my debut on Ascension.

My character, Mocking Bird, checks her samurai sword and starts running through her trademark warm-up routine, which is controlled by precise flicks of the mouse, sending the blade through a pattern I stole off a crappy Lorenzo Lamas movie... the moderators loved it, said it added character depth. I can imagine how they will edit it all together for the TV intro by adding some fog and slanted light for a dash of noir.

As I finish, I slide my sword back into its sheath and head for the door. It's time to head into the meeting with Grayson Enterprises. I'm about as sure it's a trap as I am sure GE set-up my partner. There's going to be hell to pay - probably with lots of tech-ninjas and the mysterious drones I heard rumours about in the Ascension forum. The new Grayson levels and plot leading to this point are too complicated and polished to have been created by anyone else except a special team.

Ever since I had seen the first episode of Ascension I've been looking forward to this scenario.

Televised

Imagine a game where the ultimate reward for great play is to be featured in a half hour TV show. It could be a hybrid of MTV's Aeon Flux, American Idol, Cops and the Twilight Zone. Imagine how many copies of a game you could sell if people thought, that maybe, they too could earn the chance to have their finest hour captured in a dodgy sci-fi action show for millions of people to watch.

Think how seductive it would be to build an eccentric character from scratch with the goal to gain a spot as a villain and the dream to take out the pratty hero?

The lure of fame and fortune is a powerful one, and developers in the lucrative, but competitive massively multiplayer online game market, know this as well as any Hollywood agent with a dented and crusty casting couch.

To launch your massively multiplayer game you would use the idea of the TV show and profit sharing to lure all of the most interesting and accomplished role-players from around the world.

For the moderators, scouting the beta for the first show would be a piece of cake after checking the forums and message boards for suitable characters.

After you get up to speed, you'd have a pool of several hundred thousand players, from which talented writers would find at least one character and storyline each week to work with. Possibly

moulding it to a show on par with Charmed, Enterprise or Xena.

Even better still, you could have casting missions where the game masters check a player's style and snappy one-liners and then offer their character or group a special mission based on their current project, whether it was a guild war, grand theft crystal, crafting an item or whatever.

These scenarios would be written by a special unit of writers with TV experience, level design know-how, and since they'd be drawn from industry geeks, they're bound to have plenty of dungeon mastering experience between them.

There would be a whole world of adventures to draw on and you could set up grudge matches, follow two characters tracking down the same item, drop in the character's online friends or love interests and generally set up some very watchable adventures. You could even break the game into leagues where you work up to more and more prestigious servers, so that SlongMan isn't wandering into your episode.

Technically Speaking

In just a few years, computer technology will allow home PCs to render scenes comparable to the Final Fantasy movie in real-time and cell shading could probably expand the visual concept to anime.

Even the current level of modding and sharing technology, as seen in the game Second Life, would allow a huge range of variation and motion blending for individual characters, which raises the bar in facial expression and movement.

Filming your show would be as simple as reading the information sent between server and client and reconstructing the scenes from any angle you wish. By re-rendering the scenes, you could increase the resolution, add in additional effects, choose your camera angles, change the lighting and even drop in corporate logos for advertising bucks. You could even add complex expressions using an actor and some face sensors.

Finally, headset technology would let you record all of the players' dialogue and if it didn't sound right, well, then you've always got the guy with sensors on his face for some re-recording.

Present Day

There is already a game called Evolvers in production, which links a TV show to an online world. The series will reflect what is happening in the game, so players will ultimately be able to influence what happens in the live-action series.



Fans will even be able to play as characters from the TV show and even meet copies of themselves as characters. This not only highlights the blurring of lines between the real and virtual world, but it also opens up the concepts of cloning and nanotech.

The advantages for a cross-over program are huge for games studios. What better way is there to promote good role-playing and interesting character development? What better way is there to sell the idea of a social experience just short of actually playing on the big screen?

For TV networks the advantages are just as obvious. It would be young, hip, and cutting edge, but the real lure would be the same as reality TV: it's cheap. The networks would never have to splurge on expensive sets and big-name actors - unless of course it became cool to be featured in a show such as The Simpsons. It would keep the production costs lower than most TV shows, and, better still, the developers would probably foot most of the bill.

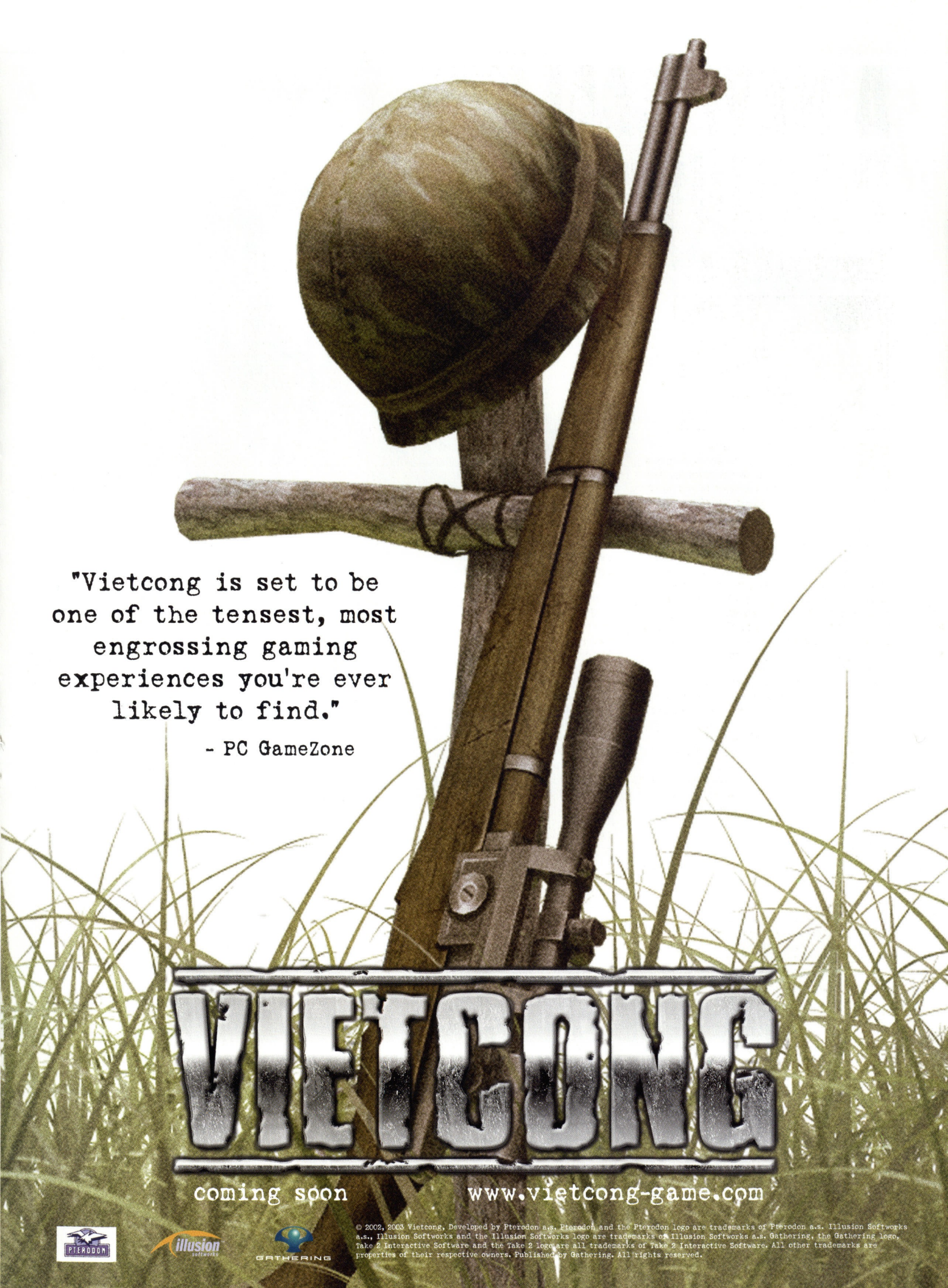
If this all sounds too big for a games company to handle, then you should consider the \$US32 million funding deal Mythic Entertainment had just signed. Financing firm, TA Associates, seem fairly sure their investment will pay off, particularly when looking at Mythic's Dark Age of Camelot already boasting 220,000 players and pumping \$3 million per month in revenue by subscription alone.

Crossing Lines

If mobile phones play full colour games, pump out MP3 music, lets you check e-mail, has calendar functions, records snapshots and video, acts as a GPS, as well as taking the humble phone message point to any greater social issues, one of them is to display just how fast technology is converging. These babies have moved in leaps and bounds in the technology arena, whereas TV has managed some serious sleeping-giant action.

One day, TV will awake to the annoying buzz of converging technology and the easy listening of interactivity and wonder how the hell it's going to catch up. When that happens, all the clear cut lines separating our media would have blurred even further to affect the way we view games.

You never know, Mythic might even come to me for Ascension.



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DIABOLICAL!

The Guerrilla Gamer



O Okay, so which nutbag was it in this great mish-mash of an industry who called Freelancer the Diablo of space sims? In fact, now that I have polluted my mind with this nasty business, I recall it wasn't just one nutbag, it was a whole bunch of them spreading this comparison like some kind of nasty virus; thanks largely to that great universal slut, the Internet.

Let me put my Magic: The Gathering cards on the table and say, when I busted open my Beta build of the game, I was massively disappointed. So, I eagerly logged on to see if there were others who were likewise disappointed. But to my horror, I found the pack of them singing Freelancer's praises and raising their hands to the skies. "The Diablo of space sims!" they cried, their drooling faces lit by the sickly glow of their cheap fishbowl monitors. Damn them all, I say, Freelancer is nothing like Diablo. To compare the game to Diablo is an insult to those weird guys at Blizzard who put such a scary amount of time into their Action-RPG click-fest.

Type! Nerds type!

Don't get me wrong, I hate Diablo, too. I hate its repetitious, RSI-inducing gameplay. I hate those respawning little monsters you can only kill by taking to the flowerpot stuck on its head. I hate the way chests full of hugely valuable booty are just sitting around in open farmland. I guess I'm speaking specifically about Diablo 2, because I only ever played Diablo for about five minutes, and I assume, for their sake, the nutbags were comparing Freelancer to the relatively recent Diablo 2 and not the comparable fossilised Diablo.

Here's hoping these people haven't pulled this fallacious similarity out of their oversized spotty arsens. But for the sake of argument, let's assume the reasoning goes something like this: Diablo 2 is hugely repetitive, but perseverance yields great rewards, such as expanded skills, better stats and unique items. Freelancer is also repetitious, and by maintaining a studious dedication to the repetition, the financially savvy can purchase better guns, better ships and... uh... actually, nothing else. Just better guns and ships.

Despite these similarities, Freelancer displays one key difference: collecting stuff makes no difference to the game. Better ships and guns just unlock proportionally more difficult enemies, so the gameplay experience never really changes - just the colour of your laser beams. At least, in Diablo 2, when you get the Unique Armour of the Blistered Elk, or whatever, it unleashes fully sick zombie warlords of +12 freeze and lightning attacks. I'm proud to be making this up - you'll never catch me actually knowing anything so anal. So, sit back and think, "damn I'm glad I just spent six hours clicking on an endless stream of Wamblers oozing forth from Level 16 of The Nightmare Crypt."

Scratch my itch

Of course, I also think designing a game that appeals to the collector mentality is in the same

league as the makers of Coke allegedly putting some magical stuff in the drink to make you thirstier as you guzzle it, thereby forcing you to drink more. Diablo 2 shamelessly locates an essential human toggle and toggles it until the toggle snaps off and is jammed in the 'on' position. People who dig the whole collecting thing - you know, stamps, postcards, matchbox cars, women's underwear from backyard clotheslines - simply can't get enough of Diablo 2. They have to load it up just one more time to find the Gauntlets of Yore and then the whole set of Yore accessories - helm, greaves, chestplate, chemise, etc..

Where is this in Freelancer? It's nowhere, that's where it is. Peering myopically at a set of unintelligible stats and trying to figure out whether or not the new gun has exactly the same graphics as the old gun does my head in. Worse still, you have to wonder about a gun you can carry onto your ship, which totals up in my ledger as anything but compelling, Diablo-like, gameplay. And as a side note, Freelancer doesn't even scratch the essential collector's itch; although, it does present a nasty skin disease.

Click me baby...

Diablo 2 defies the critics. It's easy for an experienced reviewer to look at it and pick it to bits - repetitive, soulless, trite and, did I mention, repetitive? - yet these same reviewers will agonise like a neurotic hostess over whether or not to upgrade Primal Roar to one more level or spend the point on a new bad-arse skill for their Barbarian. Although, its hackneyed fantasy world is as shallow as a Nyngan swimming pool, you can't deny the gameplay is deceptively deep. Character progression is cleverly designed, and the unique items are really worth collecting, but because they are found so many hours into the game, many reviewers miss them and write off Diablo 2 as a competent, but unspectacular update to the original.

And perversely, it's Freelancer that gets smothered in badly directed praise - praise for a 20th Century graphics engine, for Space Invaders gameplay (without the stunning simplicity), and for simply being "a great shooter", whatever the hell that's supposed to mean.

...one more time

At the end of the day, the only similarity Freelancer and Diablo shares is the mouse clicking. A lot of it. But, using the same token, this makes a modern



Internet browsing experience exactly like Diablo - you click your mouse excessively to close the endless stream of pop-ups all offering you low, low prices on crap games like Freelancer.

I'll cast this vitriol aside for the moment and say, I would really like to see a space sim taking a few cues from Diablo 2; tooling about the Galaxy looking for the golden retro rockets of +13 stellar nebulosity would really be something. Although, if I land on some blasted rock at the arse-end of the Coalsack with a technocrate full of fusion laz-cannons sitting there, no amount of slaving alien monstrosities with flowerpots on their heads will keep me from throttling the sloppy designer responsible. Tighten your act boys - I'm out there.

The Guerilla Gamer is a veteran gaming journalist who recently enjoyed the benefits of extensive therapy at a very private and exclusive hospital. His acid wit has been curbed, in exchange for a promise of better working conditions. He would like the women of Australia to know he is available for intimate romantic encounters, as long as she pays and doesn't expect him to dress nice or shave or anything.



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COMPATIBILITY:



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All Models



PC Laptop:
All Models



Apple:
All Mac models
equipped w/
headphone jack



Portable Audio:
mp3 players,
discmans and
walkmans equipped
w/headphone jack

SYSTEM:

Input Impedence:
>5K
Signal-to-Noise:
>80dB
Frequency Response:
50 - 20kHz
Input Sensitivity:
400 mv rms for rated power output
Voltage Input:
120VAC

SUBWOOFER:

Drivers:
One 4.00 inch Magnum transducer
Power:
24 watts at 10% (THD+N)
Crossover Frequency:
180Hz
Dimensions:
Width: 9.0 inches Depth: 9.0 inches
Height: 9.0 inches

SATELLITE:

Drivers:
One Odyssey Plus transducer
Power:
8 watts per satellite at 10% (THD+N)
Dimensions:
Width: 3.0 inches Depth: 3.0 inches
Height: 3.0 inches

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Yes! Actually I have been to the website, as a matter of fact, and I can tell you the model number of the PCPP Gold Award winning Mitsubishi Monitor is:

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Redfern NSW 2016**

"...I found that the guy had wiped my original HDD with my system on it!"

"...the long and the short of it is I should've backed up my files..."

"...because you never know what's going to happen."

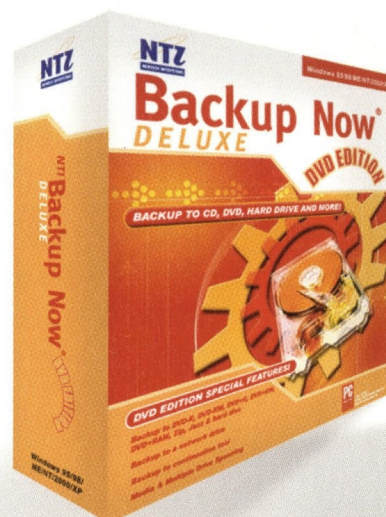
Ben Breece, PC Powerplay, Feb 03

Check out the letters section of PC Powerplay Issue #83, page 10.

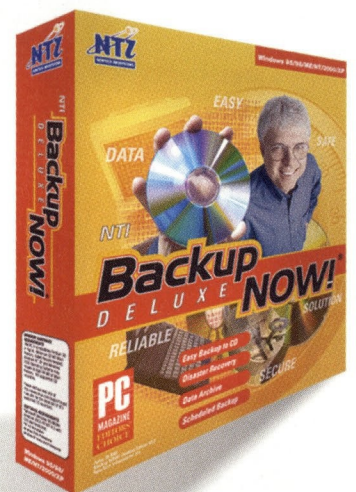
Poor Ben Breese lost everything because he didn't backup!

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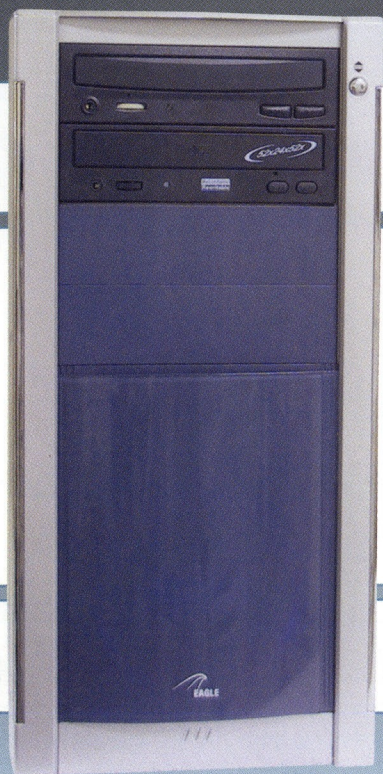


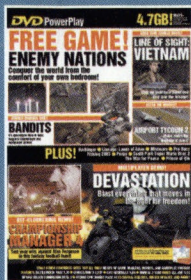
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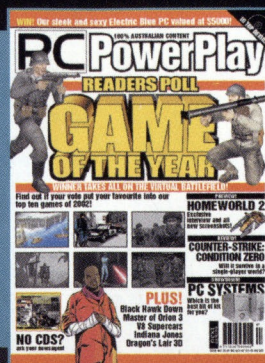
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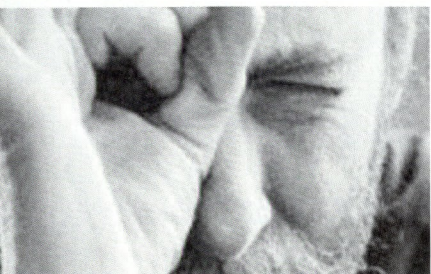
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IN PREVIEW

THEY GIVE US THE CODE, WE GIVE YOU THE LOWDOWN

GAMES



Despite recent market trends, I'm still convinced PC remains the home of true gaming. I still believe when it comes to truly mega titles, games that create subcultures and endure year after year, the PC is the only platform that has real staying power.

Take Counter-Strike as a prime example. It's not even a 'proper' game in a commercial sense, as it's available as a free download for all owners of Half-Life; it uses heavily modified Quake

technology, that's Quake1 folks, a 3D engine the best part of seven years old; it's played globally by millions in dingy bedrooms, smoky garages, greasy Internet cafes and even on cable television stations in South Korea.

PC was the birthplace of Counter-Strike, as it was the birthplace of the modern Realtime Strategy. While other games had toyed with the model, it was Westwood's original hit Dune 2 that brought this massively dominant genre to our screens. RTS is a very particular game type that demands a PC to be played properly - only with PC's adaptive and flexible control systems (keyboard, mouse, joystick and any other bizarre peripheral you can think of) can the complexity of an RTS be deftly manipulated.

Of course, RTS was so successful it started to get blasé. An endless parade of C&C clones stupefied the genre to such an extent, only the dependable iterations of the classics - Age of Empires, C&C, the 'Craft titles from Blizzard - attracted any real interest. Then in 1999, new developer, Relic, released HomeWorld and brought with it fresh blood and ideas to RTS in a space-based strategy game that evolved from a familiar set of gameplay tropes.

Why am I gibbering about Counter-Strike and HomeWorld? Why, because their respective sequels are finally upon us. This month, fresh from a Vivendi games festival in Berlin, we've taken a fresh look at Counter-Strike ConditionZero (C0) and HomeWorld2.

The big question of course is will these games innovate to the same level as their prequels? Or will bottom-line-focused publishers demand that CSC0 and HW2 be little more than graphical and content updates of their forbears?

This is what stifles innovation and creates the clones, of course, we've said it time and time again in these pages - if Game A is new and fantastic and takes a punt and sells a gazillion copies, well, then why take a risk on Games B through Z? Why not just make Game A2? And Game A3?

Should we hold our breaths for a new and dynamic action RPG this year, or instead place bets on the inevitable announcement of Diablo 3? Should we be starting a pot on which publisher will grab a new innovative RTS, or should we instead be trying to second guess Microsoft on what the next Age will be Of?

Since gaming has become big business we've enjoyed many benefits. We've had the likes of Battle.net and the Microsoft Gaming Zone to put us in contact with our peers. We've had regular and (mostly) reliable patches from id Software, Blizzard, Westwood and most other major developers. We've even got a number of quality glossy magazines to choose from each month and read about the amazing new titles due to hit shelves in 2003.

But, we've also lost a lot of the innovation of the 80s and early 90s. Will it ever return? Some see the Internet as the great white hope of PC gaming. Others put their money on crazy Japanese developers not afraid to try new things.

Gaming will probably evolve, because there's currently too much invested in its development for it to fade. And there is still, in the dark dusty corners of the half-forgotten garages where the C64 still lurks, that delicious forbidden knowledge that if it all goes south, great games can ultimately still be created by one man and a fistful of Assembler. Now excuse me, I'm off to download MAME.

Justin Hoffman
letters@pcpowerplay.com.au



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HOMEWORLD

Relic Entertainment refines their debut masterpiece

It seems sequels reign supreme in the games industry - even more than in cinema. This current trend may be because game sequels often meet the expectations of gamers, which is not always the case for cinema buffs; or it may be because the sequel of a hit title guarantees sales; or it may be because companies fear innovation. Whatever the reasoning, it is a blessing that for every game series worn into the ground, as seen in Mechwarrior 5 that was recently "rested" by FASA Studios, there's another truly satisfying game, which deserves a sequel. Homeworld is one such title.

The faithful will remember the stunning visuals, not only in pure technical terms, but also as a distinct style set apart from other games. The clean lines and stark cutscenes were clearly influenced by science fiction, but with a closer affinity to the very-adult 2001: A Space Odyssey than Star Wars. This was a more serious game, who's lofty goal was to return an alien race to their homeland in a journey that was the first space RTS to present the movement and combat units in a three dimensions. At its most dramatic, masses of units toughed it out in space with whizzing fighters, cantering frigates and the slow ominous creep of capital ships.

Freeing Cameras

The changes we will see in Homeworld 2 are not broad strokes on the canvas but, rather, finer brush details. Relic Entertainment hopes the

Reset Freedom Camera

A camera system offering too much freedom is a bigger mistake than one offering too little. Homeworld 2 offers a default view key to a consistent and familiar perspective. This will return the camera view to face north over the fleet. So, after all the dramatic scrolling and panning for a particular view of events, a single keystroke promises a return to a familiar perspective. This will maintain a clear perspective of which way a group of ships face and what position it is in. This kind of freedom - and security - should be a welcome addition to the mass of unwieldy cameras found in present strategy games.

sharpening the focus on general points will bring the picture into clearer perspective. The most fundamental change is in camera control, which is the first and last hurdle in modern 3D games.

In Homeworld, the camera was tied to one ship - any ship. It was a fully functional 3D camera, but it could only focus on and move to a single vessel. The camera could zoom in and out and rotate around a ship, but to move the focus somewhere often involved a convoluted approach, which had the player select a different ship, hit F (Focus) and then rotate around the ship for the chosen perspective. Homeworld 2 has taken some of these restraints away and put in place the ability to move and pan the camera anywhere in space.

Vertigo Free

The ultimate aim of the new 3D camera is to remove the feeling of vertigo when the player's perspective is haphazardly dragged around when the camera changes views. This is particularly so in situations where all that is desired is a glance 90 degrees to the left or right. By offering more control in directing the camera, Homeworld 2 will closely resemble the seamless 3D interface gamers have been hankering for, but we've yet to see.

Another change that has been made is to the Tactical Overlay, or map view, which, in the original Homeworld, was purely informational. Although lacking the sparkle of the rendered engine, it provided a large-scale view of the battlefield with marks representing your ships and those of your enemies - a perfect perspective to wage war in. But, it was impossible to give orders from this overlay, so in Homeworld 2 you will be able to play from the Tactical Overlay, which you have been able to do elsewhere in the game. We are reliably informed one of the level designers at Relic refuses to play the game any other way.

Control Concepts

The best selling point for the original Homeworld was moving and controlling in 3D space, but actually controlling units was somewhat less impressive. If you cast your memory back, you will remember that in order to move a selected ship on the Z-axis, you had to hit M for Move, position the mouse, hold shift to move up or down the third dimension and then



Developer: Relic
Publisher: Sierra
Rating: TBA
Available: August 2003

WORLD 2

click to confirm the movement. This was complicated in a training mission, let alone in the heat of battle when it became challenging and, in short, convoluted.

The development team was guided by the principle of removing extraneous commands (see our interview with Relic developers for more on their approach), and in this case, the decision was made so a player could move their ships using the mouse alone, thereby considerably reducing the complexity. You will now be able to move ships by right-clicking, anywhere in space, which brings up the movement disc, and then click and dragging with the left button for pitch, that is, placement on the Z-axis. Releasing mouse buttons sets the position. Granted, this method uses both mouse buttons, but it certainly removes the keyboard from the equation.

Logical Directions

Further to the idea of more intuitive controls, the right mouse button will now correspond to individual ships within the context of the map. When a fighter, for example, is selected and the cursor is right-clicked at a friendly unit, it'll move to that unit. If the same fighter is directed to a carrier with a right-click, the selected ship will dock. Similarly, a right-click on any enemy unit will cause the fighter to attack. Right-clicking a resource collector on resources will direct it to gather. These commands can be overridden for manoeuvres that are more complex but as a first option, this is a great improvement.

The game offers a number of different displays. The Head Up Display returns with the relevant functions and buttons to bring up

windows, such as the Build Manager, Launch Manager and Research Manager. However, the main view of the action is now central and the action is visible at all times. Therefore, when the Build Manager is open it now appears down the side of the screen, but doesn't replace the main window, so your ships and their movements are still onscreen. There's also a clean, open cinematic view, which presents the game world and nothing else - no Head Up Display (HUD). Apparently, Homeworld 2 can be played entirely without the HUD, which allows the use of keyboard shortcuts alone.

Restyled Formations

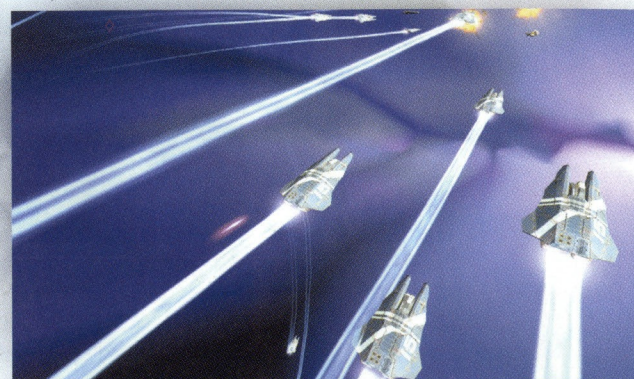
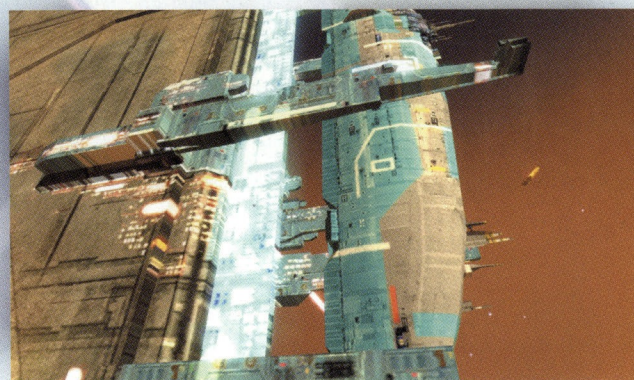
Originally, formations in Homeworld were geographic or geometric arrangements of ships. These included the Wall, the Sphere, Broad, and everyone's favourite, the Claw. Flying along in the stunning 3D engine, these formations were glorious, but it seemed as soon as a battle was joined, the formations ceased to function. A vivid memory is of strike craft darting off as they pleased being caught in one-on-one encounters.

Relic is presenting a new concept for organizing vessels, known as Strikegroups. They are very similar to formations in Homeworld, since they do comprise the arrangement of ships, but further to that, they assign different classes of ships to appropriate locations within the group.

Bigger ships, such as the battle cruiser, will live in the middle of the Strikegroup. Bombers would go at the front; fighters around the flanks; corvettes and frigates might go near the back. They're all placed in logical situations for battle, so when a

Just like the movies

The Head Up Display (HUD) can be removed entirely from the screen and the game played in a sparse cinematic view. The functions of the HUD are to be found in keyboard shortcuts and a context sensitive mouse. The Build Manager must still be opened to select which ships are to be produced, but the window does not cover the entire screen. The numerous ways of playing Homeworld 2, if they each prove functional, should go some way to offer real customization, with a range of options for the beginner to the visually oriented to the tactically minded.





The same only different

Homeworld 2 maintains some of the musical style, story and cinematic feel of the original. However, the units of the Hiigaran and the Vaygr are entirely new. The only aspect that remains has been transposed is the shape of the mothership; everything else has been promised to be entirely from scratch. This is consistent with the story, which takes place 100 hundred years of peace after the events of Cataclysm. Technology has progressed and the Hiigaran military, which didn't survive this period, has been replaced entirely with new fleets. Then there is the radically different Vaygr fleet, unlike anything seen in Homeworld...

Strikegroup is ordered to attack, they attack in a somewhat concerted and intelligent way. Ships are promised to behave relatively rational, although the details of this have yet to be revealed. Relic qualifies these changes by promising the Strikegroups will not automate Homeworld 2. These will be micromanagement decisions and not overall strategic judgment required of the player.

Subsystems

Although capital ships had consisted of many different components, they couldn't be customised to the player's preference. Now, they can. In Homeworld 2, different subsystems can be constructed on larger ships to accommodate different tactical approaches. Available subsystems include defensive facilities, such as fire control towers, production bays for fighters or any other craft and cloaking generators. This means capital ships can be designed to fill special roles within a fleet. Subsystems also form part of the tech tree and will impact on research choices.

Even more exciting is that these subsystems can be actively targeted on any ship. The vulnerability of key structures on a vessel has a significant effect on strategy. Should an opponent's assault corvettes hamper a player, they may send a host of fighters to take out the corvette facility's sub system. While a head-on attack by a fleet may not be enough to bring down a mothership, crippling her capabilities is a very useful contingency.

This extends not only to targeting subsystems, but also to individual weapons and other functions on large capital ships. Ion beam cannons can be individually targeted and appear with their own health bars. Similarly, the main engine and shield generators can be attacked.

Two Fleets

The Hiigaran units are similar to the original Kushan craft, but the most distinctive units in the game are those of the Vaygr, the new enemy in

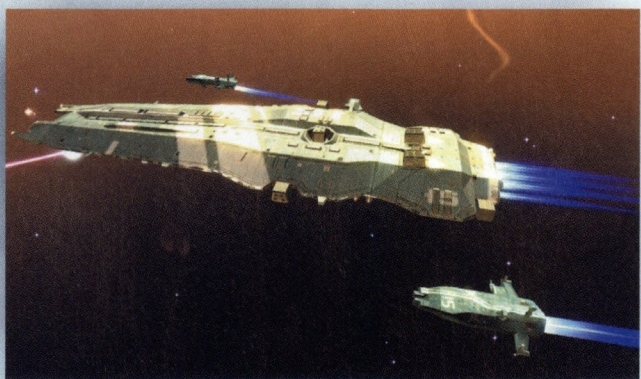
Homeworld 2. The Vaygr destroyer features an offset hull to allow for plasma beam generators. The art direction for this fleet is based on a horizontal concept and not on a vertical, such as the Hiigaran fleet. As a result, the contrast is striking when the two meet.

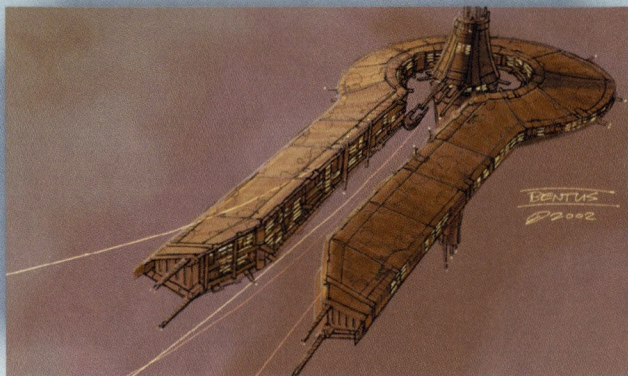
This first glimpse of Homeworld 2 is as exciting as it is for both old and new players, the needs of which Relic is trying to meet by opening up control options and simplifying the basic mechanics of play. Adding to that are Strikegroups, which revise formations and behaviours of craft; and subsystems, which allow a high level of customisation in force composition. Suddenly, Homeworld 2 looks a little newer and more stimulating than the average sequel.

There is little detail on individual ships, multiplayer options and even the storyline. Look for more coverage of Homeworld 2 in forthcoming issues as the release date in late 2003 draws closer.

It's not just empty space

Homeworld 2 wants to bring a kind of terrain to battle in outer space and in doing so bring some life to a generally static and empty battleground. By introducing environmental elements such as nebulae, dust clouds, giant structures floating in space and asteroids, the game will be filled with obstacles, but also opportunities. These elements affect the functioning of ships in space. For example, dust clouds can render sensors inaccurate or useless and can offer unit camouflage. Giant structures are hazards that must be physically avoided, but, on the flip side, can also support subsystems, like idle space stations adrift in the cosmos.





Interview

In our eagerness to uncover the latest developments with Homeworld 2, we went straight to the source. PCPP spoke about the game's development with Dan Irish, Relic Executive Producer, and fellow Aussie Morgan Jaffit, Relic Game Designer.

PCPP: Homeworld was obviously a huge success for Relic. What did the team learn from the original and Cataclysm, before going into development for Homeworld 2?

Irish & Jaffit: Homeworld 2 benefits in a number of ways from our experience with the original and Cataclysm. The most visible benefit is in the special effects, explosions and damage effects. We created a tool that can quickly and easily prototype explosion effects and get them into the game. Obviously, that's a huge part of this game, which is why we focused a lot of our attention on

I made this... once

Returning to Homeworld 2 is the concept of a persistent fleet accompanying the player from mission to mission. In Homeworld, the fleet that survives from a previous mission is the one you take into the next battle, so players can identify more closely with the ships in their command. Although, the problem is if a fleet was decimated at the end of a mission, there was an inevitable reloading of, not one, but sometimes two or three missions previous, to allow progression through the campaign. Relic promises this last flaw will be rectified, but the concept of persistent fleets will remain.

smoothing that process. We also looked at the interface in Cataclysm and have also improved on it. The engine trails in Cataclysm are quite nice, and I can't wait to show you how we've improved those FX.

PCPP: Was the 3D engine built from the ground up?

Irish & Jaffit: The 3D engine underwent a long process of R&D from which we emerged as a stronger team. We certainly faced some technological challenges getting huge pieces of artwork into the game and staying under the budget for texture memory.

Where we've made some real strides is in the aspects of 3D rendering in the engine. We're really excited about what we can do with the new hardware from both nVidia and ATI. Recently, they've made some real progress, which helps us make a fantastic looking game. One of the new features we've used are pixel shaders. This brings realism to the hangars, bridges of ships, and the engines. Also, specular maps (which are part of the pixel shaders) allow us to apply damage to shiny surfaces. You'll also be amazed at the dynamic lighting. When flying near a fleet of ships you'll see that they actually cast lights on other ships. This adds tremendous depth to the realism. On the core technology side, we're using vertex programs that transfer some of the vertex calculation load from the CPU to the video card, so that the CPU is free to do more advanced physics, flight dynamics and Artificial Intelligence.

PCPP: How many single player missions will we see? Is Homeworld 2 the story of the Hiigarans alone?

Irish & Jaffit: There are 15 missions in Homeworld 2 and a tutorial.

Homeworld 2 continues the epic struggle of the Hiigarans and their leader Karan S'jet. The Exiles thought their hardships would end when they returned to Hiigara, but fate is not so kind to them. From the Inner Rim, the Hiigarans face a new and bitter enemy. Homeworld 2 focuses on the valiant journey of the Mothership and its crew from their Homeworld into oldest regions of the galaxy only to confront a new foe and learn the truth behind their exile. In Homeworld, the Exiles reclaimed their home. In Homeworld 2, they reclaim their destiny.

PCPP: Are the ships entirely new or are they based on those in Homeworld?

Irish & Jaffit: Homeworld 2 features two unique fleets of ships. There are some similarities between the Kushan Homeworld fleet and the Hiigarans in Homeworld 2. While there are some descendants of Homeworld, most are new and never been seen. Of course, the design of the Mothership has survived for this long, so as you can see in the screenshots, it remains as the mainstay of the fleet.

We've had the Hiigarans shipyards hard at work for several years now, preparing some of the largest ships ever seen before, such as the Battlecruiser, Shipyard, and of course, the new Mothership. You'll find the galaxy scattered with huge megaliths, which are remnants of an ancient civilisation long since past, that fills the voids of space and are much larger than any ship.

PCPP: How do the ships diverge from the basic pattern of fighters, corvettes, and capital ships?

Irish & Jaffit: Capital ships feature prominently in Homeworld 2. They are the big boys packed with devastating firepower. However, Battlecruisers, Carriers and Shipyards are not ALL powerful. Smaller fighters and corvettes, when used in combined forces can quickly topple capital ships. It's all about strategic choices - focus on big ships only, and you leave yourself open to ambushes and subsystem attacks; rely only on smaller and nimble strike craft and you may not have enough firepower to deal that final devastating blow against your foe. As in any good military force, where numbers fail, combined arms win the day.

PCPP: Can you tell us something of the differences between the fleets of the Vaygr and the Hiigarans?

Irish & Jaffit: Homeworld 2 tells the story of the Hiigarans, the Vaygr story will be told in an expansion pack. As for differences between the two races, the Vaygr (as the antagonists) have very distinctive ships that draw very few parallels to anything ever seen before in Homeworld before. There are some functional similarities in certain units, but we're hoping to surprise the core fans with the sinister design of this fleet.

These differences are not only skin deep. Both races have their own playing style, with the Hiigarans focusing on sturdy capital ships and the Vaygr preferring faster, more agile ships. Research and tech-trees also vary from race to race.

PCPP: Strikegroups are a new addition. Are there different formations within

Squash a Rumour

Irish & Jaffit had this to say about rumours of AI Generals in Homeworld 2: "I'm not sure how this rumour was started, but we've never had plans for an AI to 'manage' the ships for you. We considered implementing a 'commanders' feature that would gain experience as the game progressed and give ships in the Strikegroup bonuses to manoeuvre, speed, weapons, accuracy, etc., depending upon the commanders' experience, but we weren't able to include this feature in Homeworld 2. It just proved too hard to balance and implement in the time frame we were given. Basically, other features had a higher priority, because they were, simply, much cooler."

the Strikegroup structure, or by creating this logical arrangement in Strikegroups, have you basically removed formation as a concept for players of Homeworld?

Irish & Jaffit: We've replaced the old formation behaviour with a combination of Strikegroups (large formations) and tactics settings, which have implicit formations and behaviour. What we've done is to ensure that while you can independently decide the fate of each individual ship and squadron - if you can click fast enough! - including attack priorities, targets, aggressiveness etc., you can also cede a lot of that control by assigning a Strikegroup with its implicit behaviours. The short answer is, Strikegroups make formations smarter.

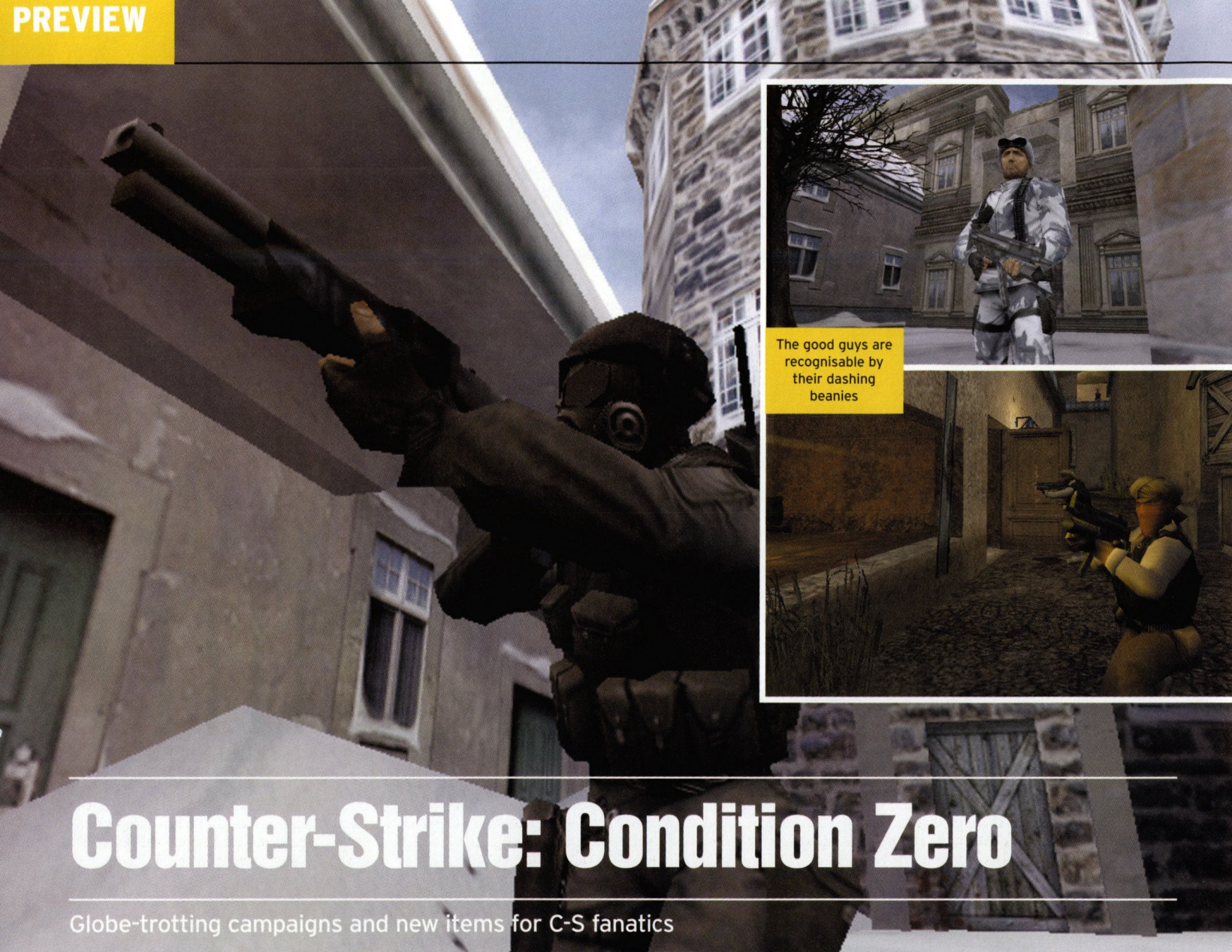
PCPP: Do you imagine Homeworld 2 to be primarily a singleplayer or multiplayer experience? What facets of development have emphasized this?

Irish & Jaffit: Homeworld 2 continues the tradition of a strong singleplayer game to set up the premise for any multiplayer conflict and familiarise the player with the world. The multiplayer experience is for the hardcore who want entertainment and a battle of the wits. I know many RTS fans who rarely play the singleplayer campaign of any game. The bulk of the RTS market is still focused on singleplayer and just as in Homeworld, we're telling the most compelling story and spicing it up with the best action we can design.

PCPP: It seems a lot of work has gone into simplifying control. Can all basic movements and directives be executed with the mouse alone?

Irish & Jaffit: Yes, the basic premise we looked at is how to simplify the controls and make it easier and, ultimately, quicker for the player to manage the fleet. We've implemented mouse controls allowing you to move the ships with just two clicks, instead three or four and a combination of keyboard command. This is another reflection of our overall policy - never remove depth, but make the basics as easy as possible. You still have the power to do everything you can do in Homeworld, but, now, you get obvious results to simple actions.

John Dewhurst



The good guys are recognisable by their dashing beanies

Counter-Strike: Condition Zero

Globe-trotting campaigns and new items for C-S fanatics

Developer: Ritual ■ Publisher: Valve Software ■ Distributor: TBA ■ Available: Q2 2003

Counter-Strike has been with us for almost three years. PCPP reviewed the commercial release of the phenomenally popular multiplayer reincarnation of Half-Life in December 2000... about that time, we were also previewing Return to Castle Wolfenstein. Regardless of Counter-Strike's aging visuals, the game continues to grow in popularity, which means anticipation for the single player version, Counter-Strike: Condition Zero, has been equally spreading further afield.

Now it is finally within reach and due in the second quarter 2003, we spoke to Eric Johnson, product manager at Valve, about what we can expect from Condition Zero and the development behind it.

"Condition Zero This is a single player campaign of Counter-Strike," he says, "The game consists of 20 missions, 3 or 4 levels each and has the player hopping all over the world, working with counter-terrorist organizations. Players take on specific roles and AI allies in

the team take up the other roles, which is similar to Counter-Strike. So, you're doing the things CTs do. Some missions involve stealth, getting into heavily guarded areas and others will have you working with a team storming a base."

Play Alone across the Globe

Condition Zero will also take the player travelling around the world from man-made environs to natural settings, which all present their own dangers. Johnson explains, "The game jumps across the globe from urban settings, to a drug lab, to South American jungle environments, to South East Asia and the streets of Hong Kong. We really want to give the player the feeling of hopping around the world."

We asked Johnson what differences players should expect from the Condition Zero from that of its predecessor. Johnson was adamant the main difference lay in the singleplayer steering clear of C-S's well-established territory. He explains, "Condition Zero is not competing with what

YOU BE THE SNIPER...

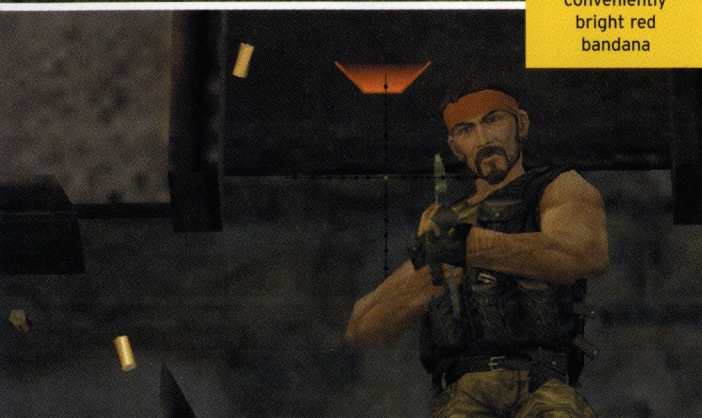
In Condition Zero, you will take up various roles within the team at different times, while AI controls your teammates. One mission is set around a large building and you play a sniper, who provides cover for a group of South Korean anti-terrorists pursuing interior targets. The player is some distance away as the team works its way inside and through the building. With the help of radio contact, they point to targets and order, "You need to take this guy down".

multiplayer Counter-Strike does. One difference from, say Half-Life, is that missions are fairly distinct, they're not tied consecutively together. Each mission is a really solid single player experience.

"However, some missions do have a relationship to others. In one, you're holding the smoking gun over the dead body of an assassinated target and most of the mission sees you trying to get out of the situation, working as a sniper, trying to get to a helicopter and get out.

"Part of what we've done is to make the player a little confused from the outset. The mission starts, they don't know what's happening but they're being told: 'Get out!





Get out! Later on the game, you play a mission that consists of the events that preceded the escape. You need to complete the assassination attempt. The game's not one long story. So, for the most part, they're unconnected missions."

Condition Zero has also taken advantage of the singleplayer by creating scenarios inspired by the cinema, which Johnson claims to enhance the dramatic storyline. "We're trying to incorporate a lot of the cinematic elements that makes single player games so great. In one Condition Zero mission, the player is working with a group of counter-terrorists trying to get into the interior of a church where terrorists are holding a nuclear warhead. By using scripted moments to get that cinematic feel, we can collect the dense periods together and create an experience."

We watched the demo of the said scenario and witness a sniper shooting down from the top window of the church with a large crucifix in the garden. He's shot and falls... directly onto the 10-foot cast iron cross, theatrically impaled and looking grisly.

COVERT EQUIPMENT

Item additions have been used to give the campaign player the chance to do more involved actions. For stealth missions, there's a little fibre optic camera, which enables you to peek around corners, look above places or under doors. There is also a regular SLR camera, so regular intelligence pictures can be taken and sent back to base.

On the noisier side, you have access to a blowtorch to open up sealed doors. Also, a remote controlled bomb complete with wheels and an onboard camera. The idea is to drive it into terrorist areas and blow up designated targets.



That was Gruesome...

But we don't see any of the jungle settings Johnson had promised earlier in the interview. However, we were guaranteed to see these scenes soon and delivered by the same engine used in C-S. Johnson says there have been tweaks to graphics to bring it up to date, but for the most part, the new models share a likeness to the original.

"The obvious visual improvements are simply a result of more resources spent on it: polygon counts are up", he says, "The thing is, we're concentrating on providing the best gameplay around because that's what made Counter-Strike so popular."

"People who buy Condition Zero will get higher res versions of all the models and be able to play with them online against anyone in Counter-Strike - even those without Condition Zero."

Badass Russian C-Ts

So, what terrorist and counter-terrorist models can we expect to see in Condition Zero? Johnson explains there will be two models, "the terrorists have the Militia and the counter-terrorists have the Spetznas. The Spetznas are members of an elite Russian counter-terrorist organisation and you might remember some months ago they saved a hostage situation in a Russian theatre by gassing everyone inside. They're kind of brutal."

We ask about what new items are in Condition Zero. Johnson replies, "One of the new ones is the riot shield. When you've got it up you can't fire, but it blocks shots from enemies in the viewing area. In one of the missions, you're working with the shields up - the guys behind you have the rifles and are providing fire. If you crouch down when using the riot

shield, you're pretty close to invulnerable. We're excited because it really changes the way the multiplayer game is played. The riot shield makes Counter-Strike more co-operative."

New Toys for a New Game

But, wait, there's more. Johnson continues, "We also have the briefcase. In one mission, you'll be helping out at a bank robbery with hostages. The criminals think you're coming in to bring a ransom, but they don't know you're a counter-terrorist. Your job in the mission is to indicate all the targets to be taken out from the inside for the snipers outside. There's also a hypodermic needle, for quiet takedowns of enemies."

"There's also the radio which you use to communicate with your team or receive orders from HQ. They also relay to you how other teams are doing in the mission or if you want to give orders. We don't want to get too much into micromanaging groups of people, but the radio's a general way we can communicate with the player."

The item additions will be supplied to the entire Counter-Strike community, but what time is still unclear. However, players with Condition Zero will also get the visual upgrades to everything. Also, Condition Zero will include extra multiplayer maps, which when coupled with the new items and weaponry, will serve to extend the life span of Counter-Strike. On future projects, Johnson is tightlipped, but you can bet Condition Zero is the first in a long line of titles designed to breathe life into the Counter-Strike universe.

John Dewhurst



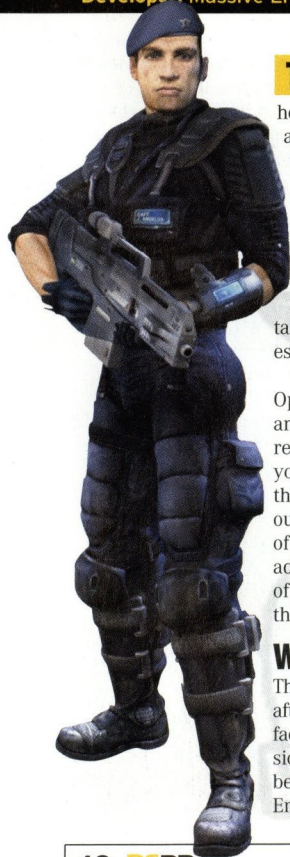


It's a lonely road to victory...

Ground Control 2: Operation Exodus

300 years after the original and planning to be more accessible

Developer: Massive Entertainment ■ Publisher: Vivendi ■ Distributor: Vivendi ■ Available: TBA



The original Ground Control arrived with little fanfare, but it soon garnered a healthy following among the faithful, as well as a big following in the big markets of Germany and France. As one of the first games to introduce tactical terrain and a more realistic approach to formation and fire, the RTS faithful responded. The game was not infallible though, most glaringly, was the inability to save mid-mission and some patching dramas early on that tainted the experience of what was essentially a solid strategy title.

The follow up is Ground Control 2: Operation Exodus and we were able to see an early preview build of the game at the recent Vivendi Games Fair in Berlin. As you'd expect of a first title that came good, the sequel looks to bring Ground Control out of a more niche territory into the arena of more accessible gaming. However, accessibility doesn't come at the expense of a high level of combat detail that made the original game popular.

We need a story...

The storyline takes place some 300 years after the original and revolves around three factions, though at this stage only the hero side, the Northern Star Alliance (NSA), has been revealed. The advance of the Terran Empire looks to crush the smaller NSA, so

the rediscovery of ancient technology seems to be their only hope. Following the more story-driven and character conscious model of RTS game, the hero is Captain Jacob Angelus, a specialty unit you can control in some missions.

The biggest new feature is the introduction of a small economy system. In the original, the units you deployed at the beginning of a mission were the units you had to stick with throughout. For the sequel, Swedish developers, Massive Entertainment, wanted to offer extra flexibility to respond to changing situations. Although a major change to the formula, the idea of letting players answer to a situation is a positive step forward; restarting a mission due to overwhelming odds is no-one's idea of fun. By allowing the deployment of units mid-mission, Ground Control 2 offers much more freedom than its predecessor does.

As in the first game, there is no resource harvesting in Ground Control 2. Rather, resources are awarded when victory locations are captured in the course of a mission. By controlling victory locations, players earn Acquisition Points to enable the delivery of more units. Acquisition Points can also be used to pay for research when upgrading all of your units. An example of this kind of research is in artillery units. Fully operational artillery has the option of

going into siege mode and enabling fire over a longer distance with a higher charge. Balancing research against more units will be central to play in Ground Control 2.

Mixing Up Missions

The maps vary in size to accommodate up to eight-player multiplayer. Single player campaign maps are obviously smaller, but

BALANCING OUT THE WEAKLINGS

Ground Control 2 looks to balance out weaker units in the battlefield. If used correctly, these measures have been designed to help infantry elude attack. Infantry units are particularly vulnerable to artillery and now there is a better way to protect them. By placing infantry inside pre-existing structures, such as buildings, they can benefit from the protection offered, whilst still engaged in combat. Infantry is also the only unit that can go into forests and hide. Shadows can also mask presence from enemy forces. More than most strategy games, Ground Control 2 forces players to make strategy decisions very much within the context of the situation.



He would normally shoot you but he's distracted by the cinematic sunset



Check out my new Toyota Tarago!



Look out, it's those pesky Tank Bandits!

larger maps are designed for missions with multiple objectives. The changing focus in single player has been to broaden the types of missions available. In the stuffed market that is Real Time Strategy, Massive Entertainment wanted to present more than simple search-and-destroy missions. To this end, they have included reconnaissance missions, as well as escort and stealth missions where you control Jacob Angelus.

come up with a strong co-op campaign, this will be a boon for RTS players everywhere. However, Massive Entertainment is tight-lipped about adjustments (if any) to the balance of the missions to accommodate this in a meaningful way. They emphasise that all of Ground Control 2 is based around a multiplayer mechanic, but if this is so, then it is unclear how a co-operative style will be fit into that.

The single player features not only the campaign mode, but also skirmish play against computer AI, an option not available in the original. This will give novice players a chance to practise in a similar environment to multiplayer before jumping in online.

Multiplayer has also been augmented. A new style Drop In online play allows for players to enter and leave a game at anytime, similar to traditional FPS multiplayer games. Massive Entertainment wants to alter the traditional perception of RTS gaming where you had to find a particular number of players, pick a

COMMAND YOUR UNITS

The focus is on small to medium numbers of units, with a maximum of sixty units per player. The sequel focuses more on individual units within a group, dispensing with the largely squad-based play of the original, which became tactically restrictive. While offering more control in some areas, the game features Command AI that manages smaller processes after orders are delivered. Should you direct a large group of units across the battlefield, the Command AI ensures each unit moves in cohesion within the formation. The challenge will be to ensure players feel they're actually in control of their units.

Another style of mission is the Capture and Hold Mission where the goal is to take and hold all of the Victory Locations for a certain period.

Basic campaign play and multiplay have both been expanded and developed. Single player co-operative play is being implemented, so the whole campaign can be played with two players. If they can

map then begin a game. This should help casual players enjoy the multiplayer aspect and generally encourage online play.

Multiplayer games begin with players controlling a deployment zone, but there are also neutral deployment zones that can be captured and used to deploy new troops. So, if you control enough deployment points, you can unlock tanks for "production". Conversely, if you lose a deployment zones, the types of units you can deploy diminish.

Massive has built a new engine from the ground up with an impressive level of detail. Zooming camera goes up to around 100 metres and above, which allows a good view of the battlefield. But more impressive (but, certainly not as useful) is the zooming to within metres of the troops on the ground. The entire map is visible at any time and the "fog of war" is created by the line of sight of your units. So naturally, a recon or sniper unit on top of a hill will see a certain distance and reveal enemy units nearby.

Ground Control 2: Operation Exodus looks to improve on the original in most aspects, from multiplayer and single player modes to resource management and a new story focus. There are still no in-depth details on the three factions or the units, however, keep an eye out for more in future issues.

John Dewhurst



What is it? It aint fireworks canons





Warcraft 3: The Frozen Throne

As inevitable as taxes, but a whole lot more rewarding

Developer: Blizzard ■ Publisher: Vivendi ■ Distributor: Vivendi ■ Available: Q2 2003

Blizzard has let loose with their code and the prognosis for The Frozen Throne is very positive. As you'd expect, the beta is all about tuning multiplayer balance with eight patches in just a month or so.

So, how does it play? Well, since Blizzard already had the game more or less nailed, there aren't any radical new changes and no earth shattering interface design changes.

However, there are plenty of new units and this is where the fun begins. The best of these are the new heroes with one new Head Nutter per race. These are generally powerful too, with the human Blood Elf hero who is imbued with some brilliant spells probably being the best addition. His Fire Strike not only looks great, but burns for

ages and does a ton of damage when powered up. Spell Breakers now give you the power to effectively steal the effects of enemy magic and turn it against your foes.

The Dark Elves have a number of new units too, but our favourite is the Mountain Giant. Not only is he built like the most imposing privy you'll ever see, but he swat enemies away to the boundary every time. The Dark Elves don't seem to get much else that is as impressive as their giant. One new hero, the Warden, doesn't

have much oomph and teleports away from the fracas a lot using her Blink spell. Maybe she works as an assassin, but in the middle of melee she seems to require a little too much micro management to be fun.

On the other hand, the Orc hero, the Troll Shadow Hunter, isn't to be mucked with. This guy is the only Orc hero with his own healing spell and for this alone is invaluable. The Hunter's Hex spell is also brilliant because it transmutes any opponent into a piddly little forest creature, such as a pig, which you can belt without fearing a return attack. Enemies Hexed have no choice but to bugger off ASAP, as they are very vulnerable even if they retain their hit points and armour class while temporarily transformed.

The Orc Spirit Walker is an anachronism when you consider the company it keeps, but it is also one of the best and most intelligent sounding Orc units to date. This apparition can fade in and out of corporeal form at will, and is invulnerable when ethereal. You can then 'fade in' and snort enemies when it suits you. Better still, when it is invulnerable it can still give aid to allies with support spells, the sneaky sod!

The Undead are not without a host of new walking wounded either, but their best new weapon is the Obsidian Statue. It can come to life and heal your units and also drain life force from enemies in a devastatingly vampiric style.

The inclusion of neutral buildings, which you can control to recruit strange and exotic allies, is also a good thing, as it tempts you to explore quicker than previously and will make even the most staunch 'turtle player' think twice about their introspection.

Unit imbalances have been addressed and now some units have been given more of a chance of performing well. For example,

the humble Steam Tank can now fire at airborne enemies once you upgrade it to a Rocket Tank. Also, those ever-vulnerable Night Elves can also fight back when transfixed, which is only fair.

The beta was rock solid in terms of keeping you connected and running well. Time to grease up your leather armour again and sharpen every pointy bit you have!

Steve Polak

TOGGLE ME STUPID!

The Frozen Throne is full of new elements and, as far as we can see, is a solid model for all future makers of expansion packs. There will be an equal number of missions to those in the original singleplayer game and a gaggle of new units after much tweaking of already existing units. Blizzard has shown a determination to make what is already a superb game excellent. Unfortunately, the weakest aspect of the game's design is the increased degree of micro-management to play the expansion pack, which is necessary if you want to play well. Many of the new creatures have special abilities you will have to try and toggle in order to access them during a fight. Whether most players will have the time to do this properly during a decent fracas is hard to say. Ignoring this, there is still a lot to like and we ask Blizzard to bring on the full release!





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The Hulk

The Action Film as Action Game Returns

Developer: Universal Interactive ■ Publisher: Universal ■ Distributor: Vivendi ■ Available: Jult 2003

The Hulk is the licensed counterpart to the Hollywood blockbuster film about to hit cinemas any day now. All gamers who've weathered their share of winters tend to put their noses up at the spin-offs for a film - it smacks of target marketing.

However, one of the benefits of these easily accessible and console-styled games is it's a chance to play a game that isn't in the top three genres: it isn't a shooter, an RPG or an RTS. It's hard to believe, but once upon a time, there used to be action games on PC.

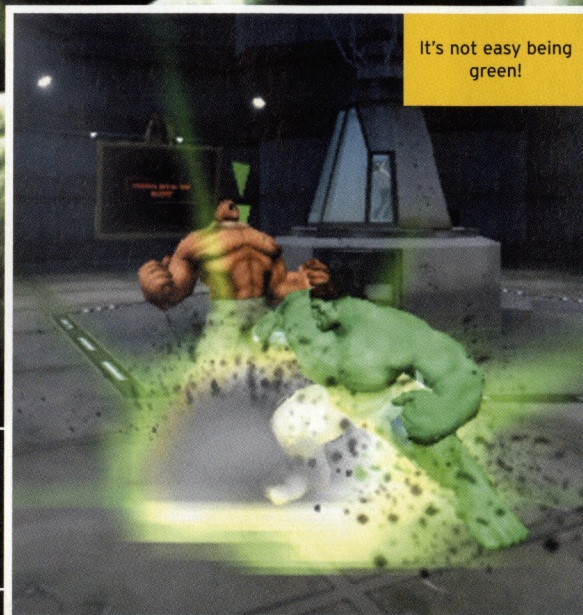
This also isn't a cheap knock off of the film's story because the Hulk's motives are vastly different to that of the film. The game storyline takes up right at the tail of the film's ending and from there develops its own narrative. However, that's not to say the game will not be paying homage to the film. Bruce Banner and the Hulk will be returning to a number of locations seen in the film and the game will feature some prominent film characters. Clever marketing? You bet.

Our play test revealed a 3D action romp with simple controls that draws some inspiration from arcade fighting games. The

Hulk himself has a plethora of moves he can string together in combo fashion. Punches and throws as well as special attacks means there is a great deal of variety in laying down the attack and defence against the hordes of riot police that swarm about the place.

There's not a great amount of depth in the game, but there's a nice level of control in the 3D environment and a skilful camera that swings around to a dramatic close up when someone's head forcefully meets The Hulk. It's the Gojira syndrome - wandering about and smashing things makes the game such a laugh. It's great picking up all manner of things and mashing your enemies with them. Most of the missions see The Hulk busting through buildings and hammering bodies. However, there is a change of pace when players control his alter ego.

The Bruce Banner missions, which make up less than a quarter of the game, are based around stealth: infiltrating secure locations, avoiding guards and puzzle solving. Banner's jaunts are a fairly light and forgiving style of mission, which sees you pulling boxes to get to air vents,



It's not easy being green!

HULK FRONTAL

Eric Bana, the strongest graduate of the now-defunct TV comedy sketch show, *Full Frontal*, is now a Hollywood star. Who would've guessed? Bana, who was better known as the best Ray Martin impersonator before he hit the big time playing ex-con Chopper Read in the film, *Chopper*, is Bruce Banner/The Hulk in the much anticipated film. In a strange twist of fate, Bana, who also starred in *Black Hawk Down*, used the same weapons in *The Hulk*. Bana has also recorded voice tracks for the game, as did most of the stars of the film, including the beautiful Jennifer Connelly. The genuine voices combined with an art style that is one part cartoon and the other part realism, makes for strong cross promotion for the film, comic and, now, game.

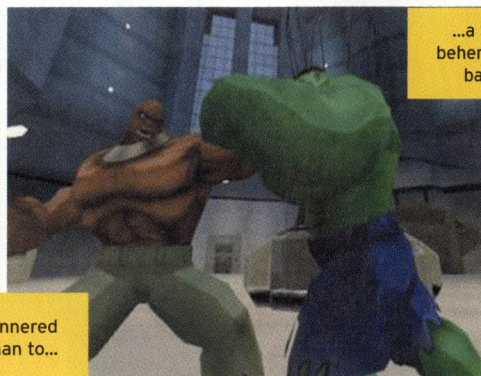
hiding behind shelves while guards walk past only metres away and solving timed number puzzles to unlock doors. The aim is to stop Bruce losing it and morphing into the Hulk, thus causing a ruckus that brings about his own destruction.

The Hulk is aimed at the casual gamer and action fan and will do well with younger fans and film nuts. On what we've seen so far, it looks to be an inventive take on a strong franchise. There's just enough variety, control and attention to comic violence for the game to be considered by its own merits. The Hulk will release simultaneously with the film.

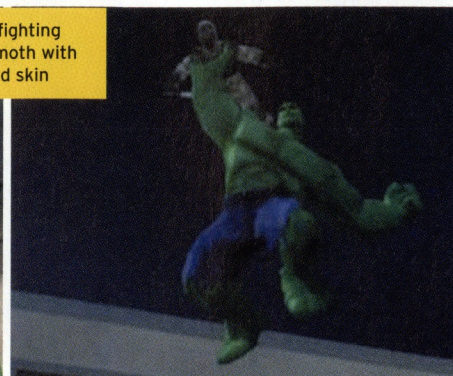
John Dewhurst



Mild mannered gentleman to...



...a fighting behemoth with bad skin



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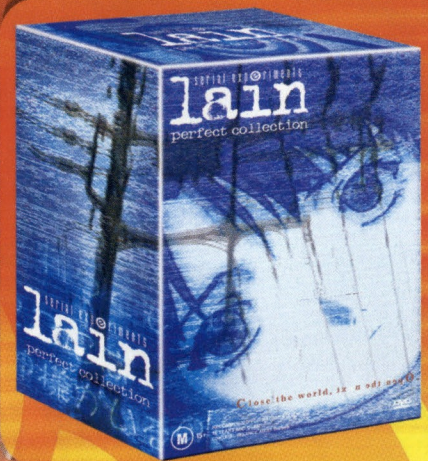
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GAME OF THE YEAR 2003 AND THE WINNER IS...



Ladies and Gentlemen, Welcome to the Game of the Year 2003. In the red corner we have PCPP's Jaded 'Do you remember when' Reviewers. And in the blue corner we have PCPP's Loyal 'I can't believe he wrote that' Readers. This is the fight we've all been waiting for. Loyal Readers will attempt to knock out incumbent Jaded Reviewers for the Game of the Year, refereed by Mabel Li. Players, you know the rules: The number of supporters speaks for the game. It's a clean rule and it's an honest rule, and let's keep it that way, so keep it above the belt and strictly no biting. Readers and Reviewers, Let's get ready to rumble!

10:

Unreal Tournament 2003

Developer: Digital Extremes

PCPP: #80

Our score: 89

We said: "A playable evolution of the Arena Combat genre."

You said: "Beautiful level, great multiplayer fun and runs great on my system." - Martin Fletcher



What is it like to have the same internals, but a lot more plastic surgery? Yes Hollywood women, but also this sequel to UT. The game has evolved into a blistering beauty with some of the crispest graphics to date and an obsessive level of detail dedicated to its models. The physics engine churns out even more spectacular model collision effects adding to both realism and un-realism. The weapons are now bigger and

meaner, characters are chockablock with polygons, and more map of the panoramic tours through fantasy locales than there were in UT. Both single and multiplayer modes run like a dream on any machine above 600MHz. Responsive and autonomous bots contend well, both as challengers or allies. But more importantly, the game can be played smoothly even on the slimmest bandwidth in dialup land. We have observed optimistic

1.5Kb/s upstream and 2.5Kb/s downstream byte counts in online multiplayer.

Two team-action modes "Bombing Run" and "Double Domination" are introduced, replacing the old favourite "Assault" mode. "Bombing run" plays like virtual rugby, which is still bloody, but at least starting to resemble mainstream sporting style.

UT2003 will become the benchmark for fantasy shooters.

09:

Jedi Knight 2: Jedi Outcast

Developer: Raven Software

PCPP: #73

Our score: 90

We said: "A blast from start to finish."

You said: "Being able to decide if I will use my Force powers for good or evil." - Jamie Barling

At first, we had suspected this might be another attempt at a coup by the Star Wars fan sect. But to our relief, this game came with enough credits of its own.

Fans of the prequel welcomed Raven Soft's respectable job using the Quake 3 engine for levels that are large and complex, challenging enemy NPCs, decent looking 3D characters and the, well, brilliant, lightsaber.

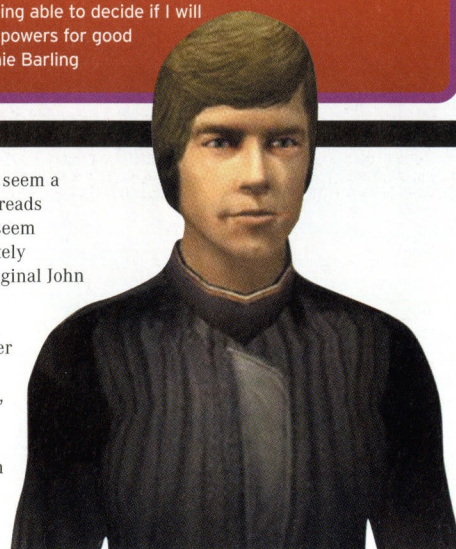
Gone is the freedom of choosing sides given to the player in the

original JK. You are basically handed the Force powers as you progress and they are mostly good with a couple of nasty ones. Although this may seem a loss, upon closer examination, this actually helped save the game from becoming a scattered mess allowing for much more complexity to be designed into the levels.

Using the Force powers is intuitive and addictively much like most power trips. A little practice will

make the whole Jedi affair seem a piece of cake. The story threads tightly making your time seem worthwhile and appropriately interspersed bits of the original John Williams score sets up the immersing ambience.

Deservingly, the master of first person action on the Q3 engine, Raven Soft, succeeds with this gratifying experience for fans and non-fans alike on the PC.



08: Age of Mythology

Standing on the shoulders of giants, Microsoft's latest instalment in its Age series is indeed worth celebrating. Age of Mythology has improved on just about every aspect in its genre.

Fans have welcomed the favour system, which has added a new dimension of strategy and unit-management. This is the resource you can gain by pleasing the right gods. A whole new range of myth units, heroes and magic powers can become available as result of suave deity politics.

In this Age title, players' mindsets are drawn towards managing their military power and bypassing the

mundane infrastructure building tasks. There's quite a bit of the old mechanics of harvesting resources and keeping up with the food for the units, but the game has been mostly shifted towards diversity on the battlefield.

The game now sports full 3D rendering, and there are lots of stimulating settings, unique unit models and very credible ocean waves to make up for any disappointments with graphics.

New comers will be enthralled by the myriad of skills to master, and old hands might appreciate this chiseled rendition of a much-loved series.

Developer: Ensemble Studios

PCPP: #82

Our score: 93

We said: "Not just a sequel, but an important step in RTS."

You said: "The only game my better half steals the computer for. Highly accessible and playable." - Mathew Willis



07: No One Lives Forever 2

Developer: Monolith

PCPP: #81

Our score: 93

We said: "FPS action doesn't get much better than this."

You said: "I couldn't stop thinking about it - even when I ate, slept or went to the toilet. I had to finish it!" - Pamela Wood



Compared to Lara Croft, Cate Archer seems to have a lot more intelligence, style and balance. Whilst these may not particularly excite the lads, it still makes for a sensational ride.

The storyline is as light-hearted as its predecessor and still manages to keep away from most clichés in its genre. Its strength also lies in its attempt to be nothing but sheer entertainment.

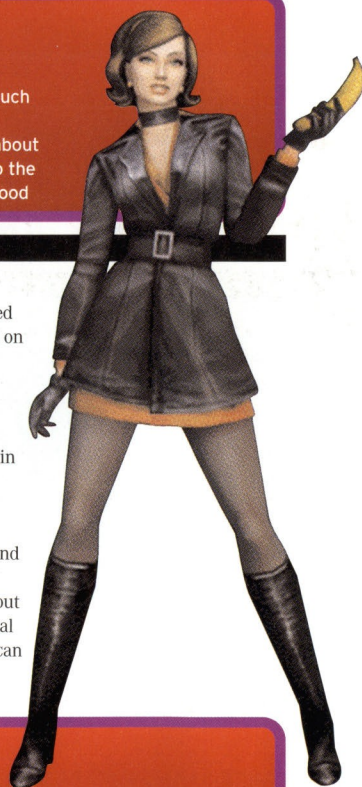
The updated engine has helped a lot with the look and feel of the game beyond mere eye-dazzling levels of detail. Instead, it is designed to feel sleek, as well as reasonably realistic, without being too serious. And, so what, if Cate wears gloves all the way

through the game?

The essential stealthy approach required for most levels is now much more merciful on the player, whilst more realistic in enemy response to detection.

What about those impressive new AI routines to cater for those 'high-pucker' moments? Enemy units manage to behave in a believable way, and are well organised enough to be interesting and even slightly intimidating. There are plenty of scripted moments, but this aspect has been tuned and is barely noticeable during gameplay.

As icing on the cake, characters carry out dialogues amongst themselves in their usual style of humorous nonchalance, and one can always enjoy a good old eavesdrop.



06: Medal of Honor: Allied Assault

We should tip our hats to Spielberg's production company and the Quake 3 engine for the cinematic-quality realism in MoH: AA. Even having your grenade thrown back in your face must've occurred to a hapless soldier somewhere and sometime during WW2, and if it didn't, then it certainly looks like it should have.

Equally impressive as the Normandy Beach level is the battle at Omaha Beach and the expressions of fellow soldiers as they make their way

up the shore after emerging from the Higgins boat. The realism, however, doesn't extend to blood, in fact, there is a distinct lack of it, but gamers with sensitive tummies should be pleased.

The sonic attention to detail is also exceptional, such as the skittering sound of a thrown grenade and the almost frivolous note of an empty Garand M1 clip. Weapons authenticity also extended to real-world inadequacies of slow reload making corridor firefights a dangerous game of

hide and seek.

Enemy AI is clever and accurate, much to the chagrin of gamers who are often caught unawares by well-hidden enemies that don't readily expose themselves to fire.

MoH: AA is a remarkable example of how well cinematic-realism adds to the aural and visual FPS experience.

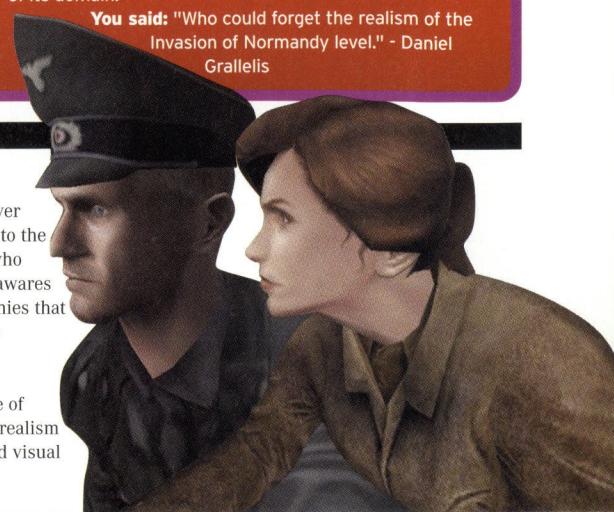
Developer: 2015

PCPP: #70

Our score: 90

We said: "As an easily accessed action adventure, MoH is the master of its domain."

You said: "Who could forget the realism of the Invasion of Normandy level." - Daniel Gralleis



05: Grand Theft Auto 3

Developer: Rockstar

PCPP: #76

Our score: 89

We said: "All the good things about gaming rolled into one."

You said: "Pure freedom to do what you want to do. What more could you ask for?" - Adam Barber

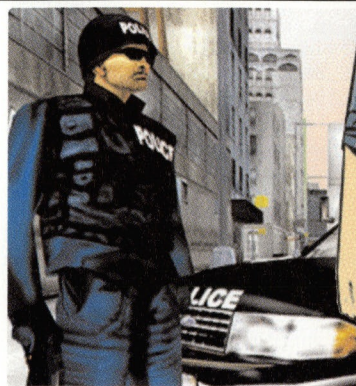
This little baby screamed its way to PC, naked and kicking with a few smudges here and there to blur the nasties. Did it live up to the censorship uproar of a blood-jelly wrestling fest just for a few cars? Nope, because when GTA3 was tweaked for PC, it was sanitised and packaged for your health.

It's a freeform gaming experience where to start the cash flow, you can either beat a passing pedestrian (old ladies included) or steal a taxi and extort false fees. It's up to you to choose which method your thug will earn his bread

and butter and this autonomy extends further out when you realise you can steal every vehicle in the game, thereby creating any number of possibilities.

In the move from console to PC, Rockstar thankfully removed any PS2 controls, which pleased our reviewer at the time and a remarkable combination of tasks and 'sandbox' mode featured in the one engine blew his socks off.

Our readers love the hidden bonuses, tricks and special items scattered through out the game that ensures hours of play!



Developer: Bethesda

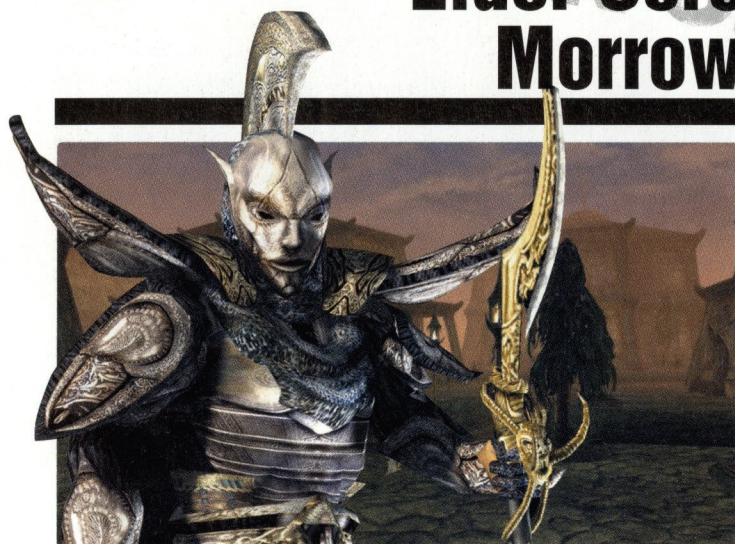
PCPP: #76

Our score: 92

We said: "It's big. Really big."

You said: "Impressive, beautiful, original, expandable online mods and most importantly - fun to play!" - Andrew Southam

04: Elder Scrolls: Morrowind



How big is big? If it's as big as Morrowind, then it's HUGE. The game has more than 1000 NPCs, 400 set quests, 300 dungeons, 70 multi-tiered complex shrines, prisons and mines, 70 alchemy ingredients, 35 cities and towns, and 13 societal factions. It's a good thing, then, Bethesda developed a simple mouse/key combination for movement controls and 9 hotkeys for skill, magick or maps. Otherwise, you'd lose yourself in a stunning world rich in graphic details, such as the lower levels of the ruins Ald Sotha.

Choosing your character is a vast

affair requiring astuteness. The process may seem daunting, but, in the end, it serves to complement a diverse world filled with equal variants on class, skill and specialisation and the almost infinite permutations.

The word for Morrowind is freedom. The freedom to be a vampire if you choose - even if it means dying a lot sooner than expected; or the freedom to take advantage of the editing options and be part of a thriving modding community. This is a thoroughly immersing game and well worth the adulation and fan support.

03: Warcraft 3: Reign of Chaos

Is it an RPS, or an RTS, or is it an RPG with RTS elements? Whatever you decide to call it, don't even think about comparing it StarCraft.

These reproaches, thankfully, haven't detracted any of the well-deserved praise for WC3's succinct campaigns, variety of play style and uneasy to navigate interface.

Its greatest strength is its energetic play that, though it may seem your strategy is not going to plan, the game is designed so you are

able to get to your commands efficiently without losing sight of the game's purpose.

WC3 also uses the 3D engines to its best advantage in a strategy game - in the background. This is a sterling game worth the release delay and deserves to be in the top five games for its rock solid presentation.

Unless you're reader, David Ward of Hamilton, who voted for WarCraft 3 because it's been a non-event year for games. Zug Zug!

Developer: 2015

PCPP: #70

Our score: 90

We said: "As an easily accessed action adventure, MoH is the master of its domain."

You said: "Who could forget the realism of the Invasion of Normandy level." - Daniel Gralleis



02:

Neverwinter Nights

GOTY
WINNER UP

Developer: Bioware

PCPP: #77

Our score: 96

We said: "Hell, it's one of the best games ever - period."

You said: "The best RPG since Pool of Radiance back in 1988!" - Scott Hale

I've never met one Dungeons and Dragons fan who didn't wet their pants over the release of Neverwinter Nights, and even without nappies on, NWN didn't disappoint.

It has a little something to offer the singleplayer and multiplayer with character depth and tactical complexity, which you are immediately thrown into after your tutorial. So, unlike Baldur's Gate 2, you're in the thick of the plot solving one intrigue after the other only to find (with pleasure) the sub-quests are just as impressive because its dense and complicated play is far superior to those little asides some developers chuck in to

extend the hours of the game.

Despite initial grumblings, a full 3D engine did not drag NWN down to mere flashy graphics and has not affected the quality of gameplay. Also, Aurora engine's interface is remarkably simple to use allowing the player a streamlined and intuitive command and control system by clicking the left and right mouse.

This is, without doubt, a magnificent example of what makes an RPG so damned attractive and compelling. And we'll even go so far as to claim it as the best RPG we have seen to date.



01:

GOTY
1ST PRIZE

Battlefield 1942

Developer: EA

PCPP: #80

Our score: 97

We said: "This is not a game; this is an experience."

You said: "Gameplay, graphics and multiplayer- it's achieved what no other game has. Near perfection." - Goran Malic

This is where our readers and reviewer touch gloves and then pull out of the fight. Reviewer, Jere Lawrence, was almost moved to tears because BF1942 was "quite simply, a masterpiece." Reader responses were also nothing short of passionate.

An overwhelming majority of gamers love how BF1942 has revolutionised the basic capture and hold team-based concept set in the tactical surrounds of WW2. The player can choose between the five main combatants with their own unique kits: the US, the Germans, the Japanese, the British and the Russians to tough it out in three main theatres of operation set in the Pacific, North Africa and Eastern Europe.

Each battlefield is huge and can take up to 15 minutes to walk from one side to

the other, which contributes to the sense of the enormity of scale in WW2 battles. This sensation of playing something extensive is also felt with the shrewd spawning controls, which has the player mastering ten to twelve soldiers on each side, but ultimately experiencing a much larger team.

The sonic quality in the game is also top-notch and fully-supports hardware accelerated sound. Even better, if you have A3D and EAX, then you can enjoy 3D specialisation for the sort of battle sounds that makes it possible to feel like you're in the midst of it all. An amazing feature is the artillery fire, which you will see firing before hearing it a half-second later, thereby simulating the law of sound waves travelling at slower speeds than light. All the weapons and

vehicles have their own sonic qualities and make it possible for players to pick out enemy approach by sound alone.

Graphically, BF1942 requires 858MB install, which can be seen in the accurate details, such as bullet holes distinct to the object hit, and the embellished images of sand spray accompanying explosions. They are impressive and contribute to a game that doesn't fall short on quality.

If you are a singleplayer, you're probably pleased with the additional 63 bots per map. Bot AI is self-sufficient and interacting with them is seamless, particularly if you're new to the game and spawning with reinforcements.

However, BF1942 really shines in multiplayer, where the fundamental rules

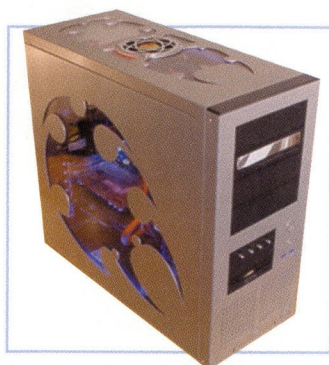
of play change very little over each map, so a savage 6 player battle is just as bloodthirsty as a 32 player.

But singleplay does provides the same multiplayer game types and, in the end, doesn't detract the player from what is, essentially, a first rate action shooter.

BF1942 is the well-deserved and undisputed winner for Game of the Year 2003 for overall excellence and achieving what some games can never dream - keeping both readers and reviewers on their seats.



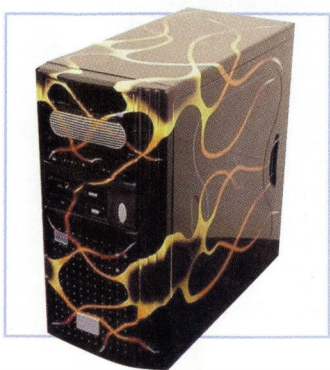
CASE MODDING



Like clothes, some people aren't content with off-the-rack computers. Just as beige isn't everyone's colour, some people can't find the right fit. If this is the case, then you've got four options. The first, and ultimately the easiest, is to go the route of apathy and just get used to the looks (or lack thereof) of your computer. It may not be the most aesthetically pleasing option, but ultimately it's easy on the pocket.

Your second option, and perhaps the most foolish, is to throw out your computer and buy a nice houseplant instead - it may not be able to play games and process words, but it will certainly add life to the room. The third option, and no less stupid than the last, is to buy a new PC every time a new look case comes out. Your PC will always look cutting edge, but unless you've got some serious finances behind you, it's not a very viable plan. The final option - and this is what this handy little guide is all about - is to modify your case.

Of course, case modding isn't always about looks, although they do play a significant part. Sometimes it's necessary to add extra fans to your case to keep everything nice and cool, in the event you've overclocked your CPU or have a case absolutely packed full of gear. Of course, if you put in a couple of extra fans to control the core temp you may also want to install a front mounted LCD readout so you can monitor the temperature at all times. You might also want to install a Perspex side panel so you can see your computer's innards are easily viewable. Some neon lights may also be advisable so you can clearly see what's going on. And maybe some rounded cables so you get a good look at all of the workings. If the last few sentences made you start drooling, then case modding could very well be the thing for you. Words of warning though, make sure your wallet can handle the strain before you start to foam at the mouth.



(OR: HOW TO WASTE A LOT
OF MONEY IF YOU SCREW IT
UP, BY DANIEL WILKS)



CASES

The obvious place to start when modding a case is to find a case you'd like to work with. The easiest way to do this, especially if it's your first attempt at case modding, is to get the nicest cheap case you can find. There's absolutely no point in going out and buying a \$500 Lian Li aluminium case if the first thing you're going to do is start cutting holes in it. By all means, try with an aluminium case if that's what you want, just don't blame PCPP if you screw it up. There's a good chance when you're shopping around for a new case, you'll be able to find one that has some of the modifications you want already installed. Many cases nowadays have variants with Perspex side panels readily installed. It may not be as fun to simply fork out the money and have it come to you prepared, but it is far less prone to accident. Other things you should look for when choosing a case to mod is the size. You don't necessarily have to go out and buy the biggest case you can find, but it is definitely advisable to get one with enough room for all your components and a little left over. The space will ultimately make the case easier to cool and will give you a little extra elbowroom for any work you wish to do later.

PAINTING

If you're simply after a facelift for your PC, you might want to consider painting your case. This is about the easiest of all modifications to do. All you need are the following tools, some imagination and time.

TOOLS:

Fine grade wet/dry glass paper (for removing the original paint)
Soapy water
Primer
Spray enamel
Stencil (if you wish to add a pattern or logo to the case)

The first part of the painting process is a rather painstaking one - flattening all of the original paint. For the best results use a nice fine grade wet/dry glass paper, which is like sandpaper but much finer. This will take a couple of hours to flatten the paint, but the resulting smoothness is worth it. Make sure you wet the paper, as this will leave you with a far superior finish. Wipe off all the paint powder with a damp cloth.

The next step is to add a coat of

primer, so the paint you add will stick well. After the primer has dried, which should take around half an hour, but check the back of the can for exact times, sand the case smooth again with a fine grade of wet/dry paper. Try not to take off too much of the primer so you don't have to go through the process again. Wipe off the primer dust with a damp cloth and allow it to dry before adding your first coat of enamel.

You want a fairly thick coat of enamel that will allow for some extra smoothing later in the process. Leave it to dry overnight. Now, use a fine grade of wet/dry paper to get the case nice and flat, being extra careful not to polish through the enamel. What you should end up with is a nice shiny case in the colour you desire.

If you wish to add a stencil of some kind, simply place the stencil, mask out the rest of the case or panel with masking tape and spray another coat of enamel on the unmasked area. Leave it to dry overnight and bob's your uncle.

Distributors

The first thing you need to do when planning a case modification, is shop around for the best prices you can find. Online shops catering to the case modding crowd are popping up all over the place, so a quick Google search should net you some good results. For local shops, some good places to look are:

PC Case Gear

www.pccasegear.com

An Australian shop catering solely to cases and case gear. Their prices are good and competitive and they can usually get your chosen parts in about a week or so. PC Case Gear also stock coloured drives for those of you who want a uniform looking case - there's nothing worse than a black case filled with beige parts.

Aus PC Market

www.auspcmarket.com.au

Aus PC Market doesn't carry as much stock as PC Case Gear, but is an excellent source for fans, neon lights and bay mounted monitors.



FANS AND BLOWHOLES

The first thing you need to do before you install new fans is work out exactly what you want them for and how many you want to install. Plan everything out to the nth degree before making a single cut. When you've decided on the number of fans, you also need to work out where you're going to put them. Placing a fan on the face and side panel of the case with a blowhole, which is a fan used to suck air out of the case, either at the back or top of the case usually makes for the best airflow. Fans come in a variety of sizes, usually 92, 80 and 60mm, so work out what size you need before forking out the cash. If you're looking for a little more visual oomph for your case there are a number of luminescent or LED fans on the market. Find the one that suits your needs.

TOOLS:

Dremel, metal saw or drill saw to cut the case
File
Screwdriver
Pencil for marking

Now that you've got your spunky new fans, the first thing you want to do is mark out where you want to install them. Make sure there's sufficient leeway on the inside of the case, so the fan itself doesn't touch any other components. Use the inside diameter of the fan as your cutting guide. Once you're happy with the positioning of the new fan, grab your Dremel (or other cutting implement) and carefully cut around the marked line. Once you've made your hole, file the edges smooth so you'll prevent cutting yourself because there's nothing in the world quite so sharp as a computer case, or having small metal flecks fouling

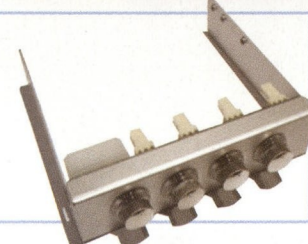
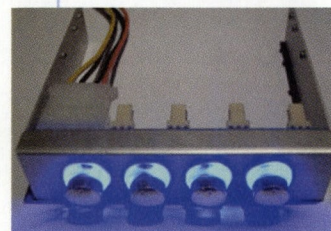
How Much Will It Cost

Completely modifying your case will set you back a bit of dosh - if you plan to start off with a fresh case you could be looking at around \$500 or so for the full kit. Case: approx \$200 (depending on case quality)
3x Extra Fans (2x Fan, 1x Blowhole): approx \$60
Rheobus or Baybus: approx \$50
Bay Mounted Readout: approx \$120
Rounded Cables: approx \$30
Window Kit: approx \$30
Neon Lights: approx \$50
TOTAL: approx \$540

the workings of your machine. It's about that easy. Just make extra sure you're of your fan placement before you start cutting.

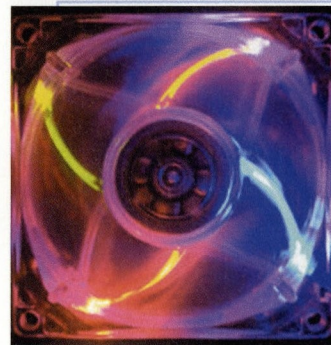
RHEOBUS OR BAYBUS

OK, now your PC is nice and cool and the new fans look pretty sexy, but you'll probably be encountering another little problem about now - the extra two or three fans create one hell of a lot of noise. Those things are loud. The solution is simple and rather attractive. A rheobus or baybus is a front panel controller that allows you to individually control the speed of the fans. Most units come with between four and six channels, each with an on/off switch and a dial to control speed. No real modding needs to be done to the case, aside from the previous installation of the extra fans, so simply slip it into one of your free bays and connect the fans. Using either a rheobus or baybus allows you to switch off or power down the additional fans during CPU light tasks and turns them up to the max when you're doing something CPU intensive.



FRONT MOUNTED READOUTS

Another front mounted mod you might want to consider is readouts. These are readily available and range from very simple to combination baybus/readout/USB/Firewire contraptions. It doesn't matter which style you go for, because they all have temperature sensors that



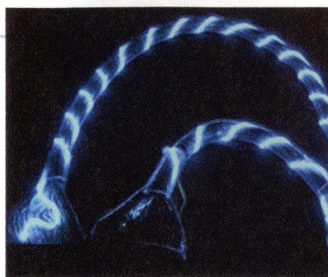
constantly update you on the ambient heat inside the case. Many models feature thermostats that can be placed direct on the CPU and GPU to let you know if they're operating within the safe ranges. Installation varies between models, but most simply require a spare bay. As an added bonus, many models come with space for an 80mm fan - if you sit the readout in your top bay and your HDD underneath, you can keep it nice and cool and less prone to lockups.

ROUNDED CABLES

If your machine is still running a little hot, then you might want to free up some space inside your case by using some rounded cables. Rounded cables are simply IDE cables that have been rounded into a fairly thick strand, which effectively gets rid of the spaghetti factory that resides in most computers. There are two ways of going about rounding cables, the first is to do it yourself. This is a long and painstaking process that involves separating the wires in the middle of the cable and plaiting them into a thick strand. This is prone to problems (cutting wires) and doesn't look that good in the long run. A far more simple solution is to jump online, find a shop you like and buy some rounded cables. They won't set you back too much and also come in a range of colours, so you should be able to find something you like no sweat.

Custom Cases

If you really want to mod your case and make it truly original, forget about buying a case and adding bits to it, why not build a case of your own from scratch? Anything that can hold the components can be turned into a case - just look at the two examples on page 59, a Castle Greyskull playset and a novelty toilet. Both contain fully functional and quite powerful machines, as well as looking brilliant. The sky is really the limit!



PERSPEX WINDOWS

Now that you've completed the practical side of modding, it's time to do something decadent - there's nothing quite like a clear window on the side of your PC showing off all your hard work and expensive components. Window kits are becoming fairly common and readily available. All you have to do is choose the shape and size you fancy, use the supplied template to trace out the cutting line, making extra sure your not going to be interfering with any of the fans you'd just installed, and cutting out the window.

TOOLS:

Dremel, metal saw or drill saw
Scissors
File
Pencil for tracing cutting line

Once you have your window, you need to smooth the edges. Depending on the kit you bought, you may need to drill mounting holes for the Perspex. Other kits use epoxy to adhere the Perspex to the case. Most kits also have some form of rubber skirting for the window that smooths out rough edges and gives the window a nice uniform look.



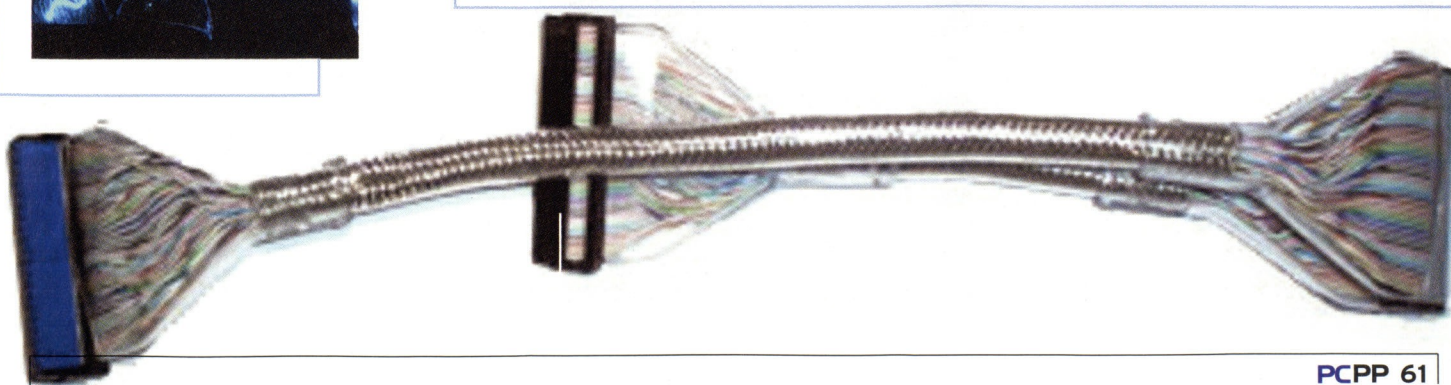
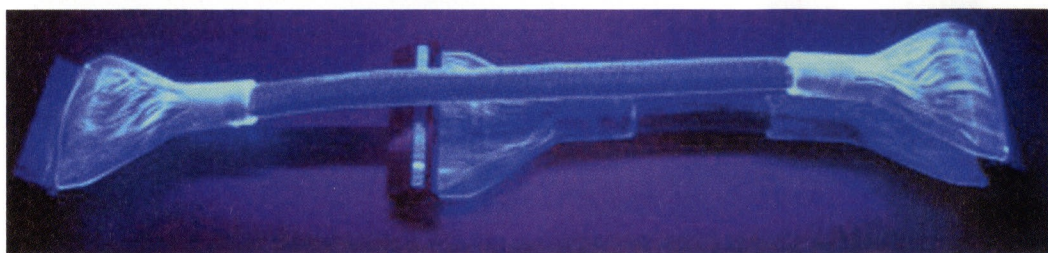
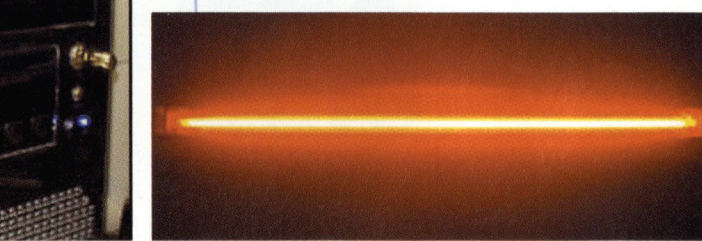
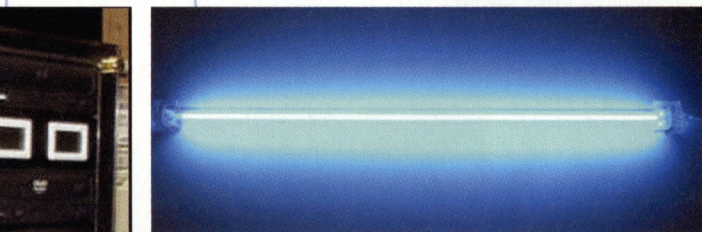
NEON LIGHTS

The final thing you might want to consider is giving your PC some light so you can see all the goodies inside. Neon lights are a cheap and easy way to add that final coat of polish to your modded case. Many online shops carry neon lights - all you need to do is find the colour you like. If you want to get really extravagant you could consider something like neon IDE cables, or a sound sensitive switch, which causes the light to flicker in response to sound and not recommended for epileptics. The choice is yours.



Teh Box!

No, that's not a typo. Not all case modifications have to be high-tech and sexy looking - just take Teh Box! as an example. It's an ugly, but strangely compelling piece of work. Sporting a sleek and "powerful" P2 233MHz CPU, 288Mb SDRAM and a 4MB video card the creator found in the back of his closet, Teh Box is housed in a Hershey's box and is held together with glue and tape. The open nature of the cardboard case means that the components stay relatively cool, but there is still a significant danger of the case burning out and going up in flames.



RESTAURANT

EMPIRE



Starting with nothing except some cash and a passion for food, build a restaurant from the bottom up - hire waiters, decorate, even cook the meals! Buy, build, outsell and underprice your competition.

Will you use your culinary wizardry to out-cook chefs? What tactics and strategies will you employ to buy out the competition? You decide. With a combination of business strategy and role-playing game styles plus a free-form sandbox game mode, three huge cities, and over 30 playable chefs and a host of locations to travel to, Restaurant Empire is an epicurean delight of gastronomic proportions!



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QUALITY VALUE SOFTWARE

IN REVIEW

THE MOST AUTHORITATIVE REVIEWS AROUND

GAMES



The art of porting from console to PC can be likened to the kid who sat in the middle of the bus and, although popular with the lasses, had the mental complexity of a walnut and therefore unable to make that prestigious journey to the back and mix with the movers and shakers. Don't knock the kid for not trying, because he did, but every time he stepped onto the aisle, the bus had a funny way of rattling over bumps in the road, causing him to fall flat on his face.

So, another console game is ported to PC and, according to our reviewers this month, it bites the dust; it lays there, coughs, pats the dust off its jeans and walks on weak legs to find a less discerning PC gamer on the bus.

What has us confused is developers aren't jumping at the opportunity to work at this problem. Here is an opportunity to exploit a platform that opens avenues for user preferences and customisation and the chance to fix bugs evident in the console port with downloadable patches. Instead, what we're left with is a half-hearted attempt to capture another part of a gaming community for more cashola and stepping out without forethought.

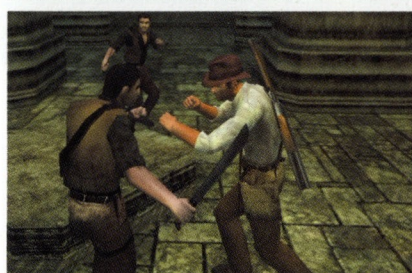
It is reasonable to suggest the rationale behind this lack of enthusiasm is the PC market isn't a profitable option for console development. Console developers have to contend with costs associated with creating another development team, rapid retail price drops of PC games and the very real issue of piracy.

But for every console development team with this defeatist attitude there is one other team learning from the bus boy's mistakes and planning its advance to the back. An example of using the occasion to improve an already great game, is Ubi Soft's Splinter Cell, which was tweaked here and there and did its successful Xbox origins justice when ported to PC.

We can blame the sub-quality of console ports on lazy developers, and although some may consider this a reactionary theory, it's also a very real possibility when we base it on the poor translation of control and interface, which can be rectified with modest research. If we are to expand on this idea, then presumably the reason why PC ports fare better on console is because it's easier to hack and shave off the bits of a big square peg to fit into a small round hole. It's a much more complex process when having to convert a console game with its single system configuration for PC, which is open ended with different videocards and processors.

For future reference, developers need to tighten their straps and pay attention to the old adage: ask the average joe. Gamers know best and are the ones happy to shell out a few clams for a decent game. They are also available to offer advice for quality (control) gaming and are also the reviewers, which is a rare commodity in media. So, if developers and publishers want to keep reviewers happy, then put an ear to the track and listen to the rumblings.

Dina Oh
Deputy Editor
dinao@next.com.au



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- 85 Dino Crisis 2
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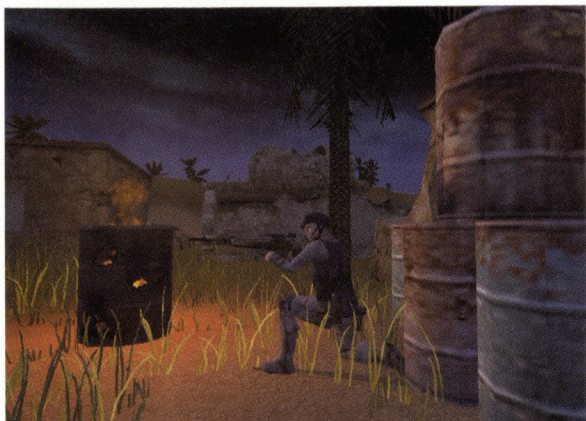


GOLD AWARD	HIGH DISTINCTION	DISTINCTION	CREDIT	PASS	FAIL
The ultimate accolade. A game that receives a Gold Award is an essential purchase, and the only excuse for not owning it is either not having a powerful enough PC, or not having a PC at all. Or arms. It represents a new direction in gaming, a new benchmark against which all others will be measured. It defines its genre, or creates a new one. It is gaming. You must own it.	This is the finest in gaming. A fresh concept, a perfect execution, a meaningful extension to a tried and tested format, one or all of these are required for this score. We strongly recommend the purchase of each High Distinction game, but extremely fussy gamers may want to skip those HD games that don't also receive Gold Awards.	An intriguing new concept or a bold new direction that manages to pull its new trick off with a reasonable degree of flair. You will be impressed, at either the graphics, the gameplay or some other new element that you may not have encountered before. Or perhaps this is a familiar gaming concept, but one executed so well it's almost - but not quite - an essential purchase.	Solid, playable, largely bug-free, entertaining and maybe even a bit unexpected, these are the hallmarks of a game of Credit. You may have seen it all before, but you won't mind, because a Credit game does what it says on the box - it plays well and it keeps you hooked. An essential purchase? Not necessarily, but worth consideration.	A game that receives a pass is playable, but its concept may be flawed, its extras may be lacking or its graphical enhancements may have fallen off somewhere in a lengthy bug-fixing process. And bugs there may be, although in the end the game will, as we say, work. Purchase if you're curious, but discerning gamers will probably look for something more substantial.	There are more than 5000 games released each year. Some are gems. Some are merely unremarkable. Others are nothing more than a shameless grab for cash. Graphics will be rudimentary and gameplay will be worse. If you see someone considering a game that has failed, gently take them by the elbow and hurl them out of the shop. It's your duty as a good citizen.
90+	85-100	75-84	65-74	50-64	0-49

DELTA FORCE BLACK HAWK DOWN

Developer: Novalogic ■ Publisher: EA ■ Distributor: EA ■ Price: \$89.95 ■ Rating: M15+ ■ Available: Now

Lights, camera, action: welcome to Africa



This grass sure is tickly!



Hmm, that there busload of people looks mighty dangerous...



"Maria, my mighty heart is breaking - I'll be in the Humvee."



It's a nice day for a war

SYSTEM

NEED

P3-733
256MB RAM
32MB Videocard
750MB HDD

WANT

P4-1.4GHz+
64MB Videocard

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

ONLINE

www.hemingwaysociety.org
Although they are on the opposite ends of the political spectrum, both George Orwell and Ernest Hemingway were soldiers turned writers. Learn about Hemingway, the literary giant, from a bunch of fatheads he would've gladly shot with a ten gauge shotgun.

Having plundered theatres of war at the Western Front, Normandy, and Vietnam, developers are starting to turn to recent history for inspiration. The Somali conflict is one that has lately drawn the attention of film producers, game developers and modders alike. This game is not a movie tie-in but, rather, the latest in the Delta Force series from Novalogic. Given that their last effort, Task Force Dagger, was a serious disappointment there's ample room for improvement.

History made fun

For those who haven't read Mark Bowden's novel or watched Ridley Scott's film of the same name, a brief history lesson is in order. On 3 October 1993, two US Black Hawk helicopters were shot down in Mogadishu, Somalia, killing 18 American soldiers. The Black Hawks were part of a mission to capture two lieutenants of General Mohammed Aidid, leader of the Habr Gedir militia clan, which was largely responsible for disrupting the UN's attempts to restore order to the region. Although the mission's goals were accomplished, the subsequent political fallout resulted in recalling Task Force Ranger, the US special

detachment sent to the region, less than 2 months after it had been deployed.

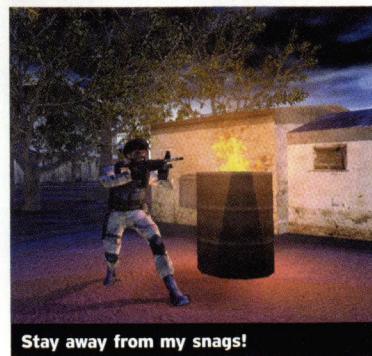
Whilst this was the most infamous incident of the Somali conflict, the journey you'll undertake in Delta Force Black Hawk Down (DFBHD) spans a much broader period of time, commencing with the initial deployment of US troops in December 1992 as part of the United Nations Taskforce (UNITAF). Whilst not recreating actual scenarios, most of the game's early missions are based on UNITAF's main functions in the region: combating local militias and providing support to the UN humanitarian operation.

There are 16 missions on offer in DFBHD, but it's only after completing the first 10 you'll get the chance to replay the actual scenario that gives the book, film and this game its name. Mission design is tight and, on the whole, the game rarely makes you perform frustrating reload after reload just to get past a section. However, because of the bare bones briefings and lack of character or story development, the missions feel like stand-alone set pieces rather than parts contributing to a bigger picture.

Mission objectives range from clearing

MULTI MAYHEM

Given the short singleplayer mode, it's fortunate that DFBHD offers an excellent multiplayer mode. The usual play modes (DM, Team DM, CTF, King of the Hill) are all on offer here through Novalogic's own free service, NovaWorld, although it's difficult to find a game that isn't Team Deathmatch. Another problem is NovaWorld's interface, which is featureless, is a pain to use and looks amateurish next to what multiplayer veterans have come to expect. Like the singleplayer game, you can't take control of vehicles. Instead, Humvees and Black Hawks make regular patrols and flights along set paths, leaving you free to jump in and take aim.



Stay away from my snags!

Given that Novalogic's last effort, Task Force Dagger, was a serious disappointment there's ample room for improvement



Welcome to Somalia!



Hello, to you, too! I'm happy to be here



One of the sight tours

BAD GUYS RAISE YOUR HANDS

Even for relative FPS novices, DFBHD isn't a difficult game to beat. The singleplayer mode on the highest difficulty setting has only about 10 hours worth of life in it. The general similarity of the missions, without a memorable standout, means there is also little replay value. The game's main challenge comes from avoiding civilian and friendly casualties; killing too many will trigger instant mission failure. Again, this angle to the game is certainly a problem real-life soldiers would have undoubtedly faced. To assist players, the targeting reticle turns red when aimed at any non-combatants. Still, with the substandard character models, distinguishing enemies from civilians at night and from a distance is near impossible.



Lots of 'colourful' scenery

out enemy buildings room by room, to providing support for insertion and extraction teams, to carrying out demolition runs on key strategic targets. Objectives are updated in-game and the overall feel of the game is not unlike other squad-based first/third person shooters, such as Medal of Honour: Allied Assault or Conflict Desert Storm.

Solo Operator

Similar to MoH:AA, your squad members don't have a significant impact upon gameplay. Whilst you are able to issue several orders, they are quite basic, essentially ranging from hold fire to put a round in anything vaguely moving. There are two exceptions: requesting a medic and room takedowns. The latter simply consists of one of your team members lobbing a flashbang into a room of hostiles and then having your team rush the room to secure each corner. Although this manoeuvre is quite easy to execute, it is crucial to success in some missions; without the assistance of your team members you'll be quickly cut down by enemy fire.

For the rest of the time, DFBHD doesn't actually require you to work as an integral part of a coordinated unit in the same way 'serious' tactical shooters like Ghost Recon do. For the most part, you can go it alone and virtually ignore what your squad members might be doing. This is probably just as well, considering your colleagues aren't exactly Einsteins. Even though they will do a decent job of covering your back, they are prone to moments of stupidity, such as walking directly into your line of fire or

pushing you out of your position of cover into sitting duck territory.

Good thing, then, that the enemy AI ranks high on the stupidity meter as well. Enemies display no sign of teamwork and will basically just stand and deliver until you get around to gunning them down. Even worse, their lack of environmental awareness means they often fail to react to gunfire and never even attempt to find cover. In the game's defence, it could be argued that the real-life local militias were probably disorganised and lacked the ability to formulate complex combat strategies. However, no one could believe they were prone to acts of lunacy, such as firing at inanimate objects, something which happens not infrequently in DFBHD.

One Man Gang

Rather than offering players a human-like, reactive AI, the game tries to defeat you with sheer force of numbers. There are a stack of hostiles in each mission and their usual tactic is to simply swarm your position. The result is plenty of arcade-like firefights and massive body counts. The on-rails portions of various missions are the biggest culprits here. In these sections, you'll be asked to man a Black Hawk's mini-gun or a fixed .50 calibre cannon on a Humvee and blast away at wave upon wave of hostiles. With unlimited ammo, these sections feel like pages taken straight out of Rambo's Manual

of How to Conduct a One Man War.

Therein lies DFBHD's biggest problem. Whilst it is marketed as a serious, squad-based, tactical shooter it actually

doesn't feature any of these things. Tactical planning is virtually non-existent, your squad members are reduced to passenger status, and the gameplay is about as serious as a Hollywood action movie. Instead, what you get is an arcade shooter offering plenty of thrills and a big adrenalin rush, which is perfectly fine as long as you don't have any preconceptions of the game challenging Rainbow Six.

Same Old Toys

The hardware on offer is standard military issue (CAR-15, M16A2, M60, MP5, Beretta, Colt) with no real surprises. The only unusual aspect is the various sniper rifles to



Friendly locals

CAN I DRIVE?

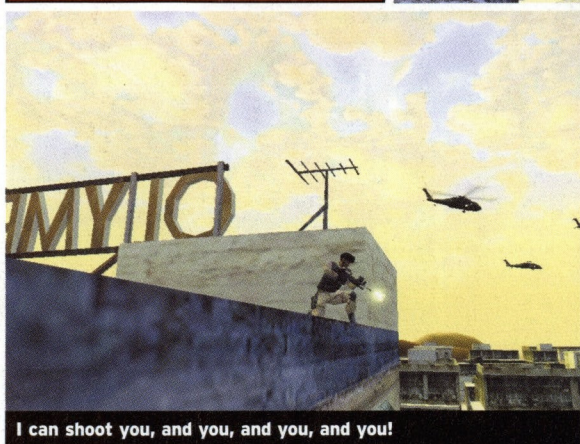
Although the manual goes to some lengths to describe the Humvee, and Black Hawk and AH-6 Little Bird choppers, you can't actually control any of the vehicles featured in the game. Instead, you're left with simply manning the vehicles' fixed weapons. These on-rails sections of the game become very repetitive very quickly and leave you wanting much more. Giving players control of the vehicles would have added greater variety to the gameplay and allowed them to make use of the game's truly huge environments. Whilst in the vehicles you're essentially indestructible, a feeling which tends to fit in with the overall vibe of the game.



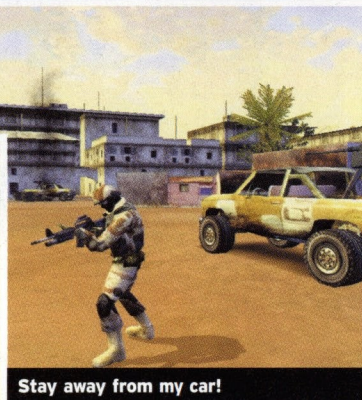
Feels sorta empty...



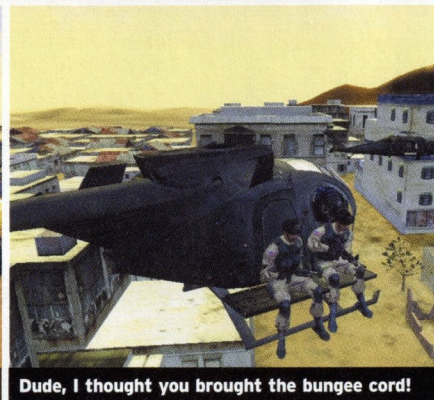
Dang, missed!



I can shoot you, and you, and you, and you!



Stay away from my car!



Dude, I thought you brought the bungee cord!

With unlimited ammo, these sections feel like pages out of Rambo's Manual on How To Conduct a One Man War

choose from as there are few missions where you'll actually be required to demonstrate your sharpshooting skills. Again arcade elements come into play because the rifles have virtually no recoil and are just a little too accurate from long distances. Shooting, whilst at a full run, also appears to have little effect on your accuracy.

There are no classes in DFBHD which means at the weapon loadout you can, with a few restrictions, equip yourself as an infantryman, heavy weapons operator or sniper. You can only carry one primary rifle, a sidearm and an explosive, such as a claymore, rocket launcher or remote charge. During the game, enemy weapons and ammunition cannot be picked up. Instead, you have to rely on health and ammo packs placed in strategic locations, usually at objective completion points. Considering you start each mission with about 10 clips and the on-rails sections offering unlimited ammo, it will be a rare situation if you are forced to ease up on the trigger-happy

action or resorting to your sidearm.

To negotiate your way through the environments, DFBHD features an easy-to-use radar map with waypoints clearly marked. This is an invaluable tool as many missions cover a lot of ground. Despite the obvious restrictions of the actual setting, the developers have provided a diverse range of environments in which to wage battle mixed with the usual coupling of day and night time action. In particular, the game's highlight is the recreation of shantytowns and crumbling urban centres and the street-by-street close quarters combat in these locales, complete with all the sounds of war, really captures what the combat must have been like.

Beauty in War

DFBHD doesn't run on any of the major FPS engines, but instead, believe it or not, on a flight simulator engine. Novalogic have re-tooled the technology used in another of their games, Commanche, with amazing results. There is plenty of eye

candy on offer here, the richly detailed environments being the standout. As you might expect, the vehicle and weapon models look fantastic as well.

Unfortunately, less attention has been paid to the actual character models which, whilst well animated, tend to look

blocky and not up to scratch with what we're seeing on other FPS titles. Still, if you consider the amount of detail seen elsewhere, the game runs fast and smoothly, which is usually the principal consideration in arcade-based shooters. Even on mid-level systems with the effects maxed out (and there are some exceptional explosion and particle effects, which you'll definitely want to see) the frame rate remains rock steady.

Background rock tunes add to the game's action movie feel, and whether you like action movies or not, the music can feel out of place and prove to be annoying, but thankfully it can be turned off. The ambient background sound effects, gunfire, civilian screams and constant radio chatter all combine for an auditory bombardment. They add plenty of atmosphere and really help to convey some of the intensity and chaos that the real-life soldiers no doubt found themselves in.

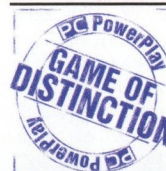
Playing this game you get the feeling that the developers have let a golden opportunity slip by. The gritty historical setting would have been better served by a shooter that opted for realism rather than over-the-top action. It seems that the former was the developer's intent, but what we have, instead, is a game that offers some decent, intense action but ultimately fails to successfully implement all of its features. Apart from the setting, there's really nothing here we haven't seen before. Whilst the film version won plaudits for distinguishing itself from the plethora of generic war films, the game, despite being well executed, falls back into well-trodden territory.

Derek Lee



No one listens to us anymore...

RATING



FOR

Intense action
Superb Environments
Atmospheric combat

AGAINST

Simple gameplay
Incompetent AI
Clumsy multiplayer

OVERALL

A simplistic action shooter for players not interested in realism or a challenge.

79



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Master of Orion 3

Developer: Quicksilver ■ Publisher: Infogrames ■ Distributor: Infogrames ■ Price: \$89.95 ■ Rating: G8+ ■ Available: Now

Only a few steps away from greatness



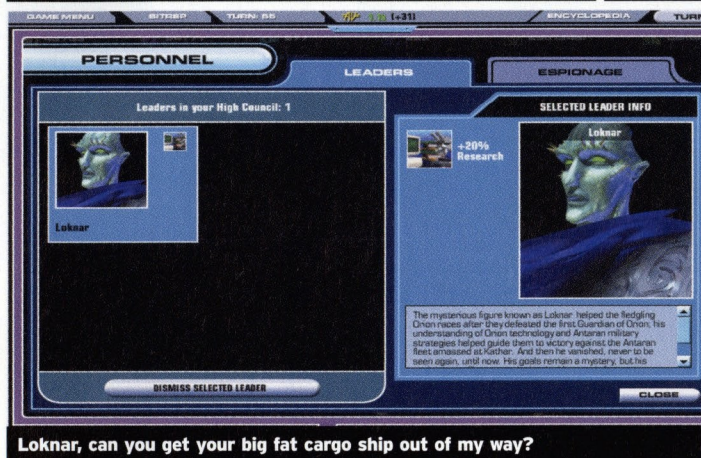
Muppets Auditions: 2003



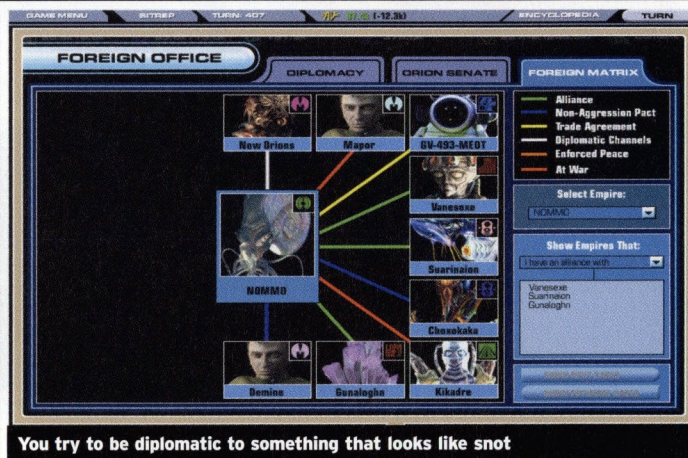
Astral projecting is so exhausting

MODDING YOUR MOO

The data files that control MoO3 have all been written in text files, so players can get in there and easily change how the game works. There are already dozens of modes for the game ranging from one which doubles the size of the ships in space combat, to another that goes through and adds hard data to the descriptions of every tech. The latter involves nothing more complicated than adding a couple of text files to an empty folder. If the files are removed, the game reverts to previous settings. Features like this are a godsend and make the game a lot more playable, interesting and fun.



Loknar, can you get your big fat cargo ship out of my way?



You try to be diplomatic to something that looks like snot

SYSTEM

NEED

P2-300
128MB RAM
4MB Videocard
800MB HDD

WANT

P3-700+
256MB RAM

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

ONLINE

<http://mo3.quicksilver.com/>
You will need this official webpage, which leads to discussion boards filled with vital information and links to mods. <http://www.pumpkinmasters.com/>
And when you get tired of playing Master of Orion 3, learn how to create Halloween pumpkins with Master of Pumpkin Carving! Or not.

The thing about galactic empires is they are big, really big. Even a small one usually has a planet, a few space ships and elite forces of millions of people wearing rather silly hats.

All of this takes organisation. Even the most simple of things like changing army designations or duties takes a huge amount of work... think of the hat reallocation alone.

Master of Orion (MoO) thrusts you into this hugely complicated tangle of orders, deceit, construction, finance, military and millinery. In Master of Orion 1 and 2, players were in charge of every little detail. You chose exactly what to build and where to build it, you commissioned every ship, you manually shuffled your population around and you chose what technology was the next big thing.

These were games of vast micromanagement. Your course was set like a line of dominoes, each piece placed carefully, right up to your destination.

This had the advantage of giving players complete control, but it got very unwieldy as your empire stretched to dozens of planets all requiring the hands-on approach. It also meant that your empire was little more than a puppet reflecting your whims without a personality it can call its own. MoO3

MoO3 can be likened to a small cube with two million cogs - everything is connected but you'll be buggered if you can work out how

comes out all guns blazing to fix these problems and, in doing so, has moved the series into a bold new direction.

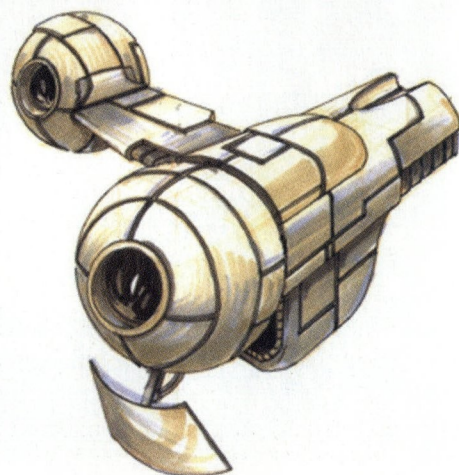
Smooth Sailing

MoO3 features the brand spanking new concept of self-sufficiency. It may seem controversial to say some strategy games, such as Master of Orion 2, SimCity and Civilisation 3, are bereft of qualities meant to do its genre justice. Yet, consider how these games have structures, which, in a matter of turns, often fall in a heap if the player takes a passive route.

Unlike these games, MoO3 continues to run along nicely even if the player decides to bar taking action. It's a new philosophy: instead of placing everything in place by hand, you now command an empire as you would a naval aircraft carrier. It's simply too big to be controlled by one person running between the battle stations, manning the navigation systems, controlling the throttle, loading torpedoes and handling the rudder. To co-ordinate all this, you need a captain who gives a

command, which is then filtered down to the hundreds of crew below who have been trained to interpret these orders into dozens of different actions.

Even if the captain was silent for days, or weeks, the crew would keep doing their jobs and the carrier would manage to go on



HISTORY OF MOO

Simtex first submitted Starlords to Microprose back in 1993. The boffins there decided to call it Master of Orion and I lost a lot of sleep playing the game all night when I should have been drinking myself stupid at schoolies. In 1996, the sequel came out. It was Master of Orion: Battle at Antares or MoO2: BaA. After this game, Alan Emrich, a journalist and the writer of the MoO strategy guide, struck up a conversation with the designer from both of the original games and they agreed, if they were going to do another, they would make the empires come alive. With this in mind, Alan managed to hook up with some like-minded people (Quicksilver) and MoO3 was born.

without falling apart at the seams. Chances are it'd be fine until it ran into a situation that needs precise and rapid strategic control, which is what MoO3 offers.

The artificial intelligence that runs each planet is capable of building colonies, which make the most of natural resources and can even expand to new worlds, but, together, the AIs will never allow you to win the game - and that's where your skill comes in. If you're playing multiplayer then this detail is even more pertinent. If you start complaining that the game runs itself then

you've missed the point. MoO3 lets you concentrate on the areas of the game you love, while the rest runs itself.

Steer, Don't Push

As I've pointed out, this is a game of management. Trying to wage open war with your planet AI will have you pulling your hair out. It will cause your items to disappear from build queues and the priority sliders on planets revert to previous settings, giving you an AI equivalent of the finger.

Don't panic - this isn't a bug; it's one of the strengths of the game. What is occurring, is the viceroy planet AI is pushing back against your outrageous commands like a real-world leader.

If a planet is starving, it is going to drop the Deathstar construction and build farms. It's obvious this is a sensible option as it prevents everyone dying of hunger half way through completing your orders.

If you have your huge industrial planet in place, bump up your military budget and set "military" as that world's Development Plan then you're ready to put in a call for the Emperor - the Deathstar is on its way.

If you want to guide an aircraft carrier around an iceberg you have to call the orders out before you hear the grating sound.

Once you get the feel for steering, instead of getting out and trying to push, you'll find the colonies will do just what you tell them. When you master things like the development plans and budgets, you'll be able to manipulate the planet AIs into running the empire exactly to your specifications.

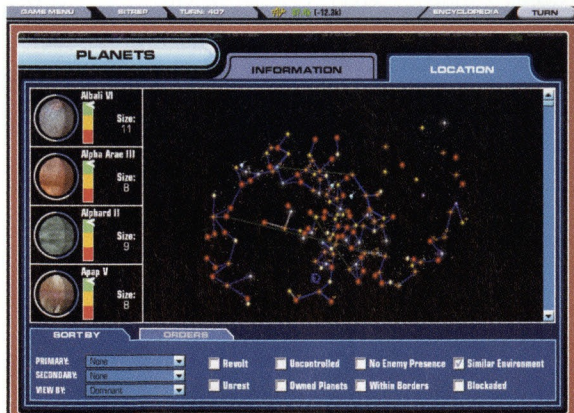
Using the powerful development plans you can do something as simple as switching your entire Empire's focus into research with a few clicks. Or you can command something as



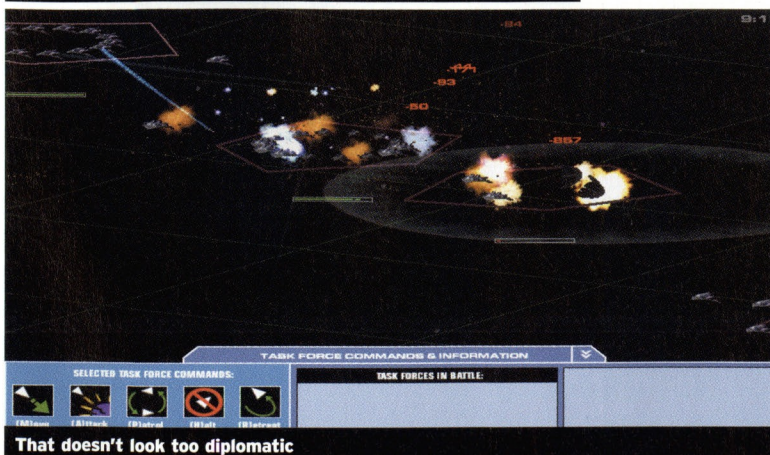
Alright you mutants, let's play ball. That's diplomatic isn't it?

complicated as telling research planets to research whilst instructing newly colonised planets to build themselves and industrialised worlds to pump everything into consolidating its military. Once you master the controls, it's clear the system is elegant and anything but restrictive.

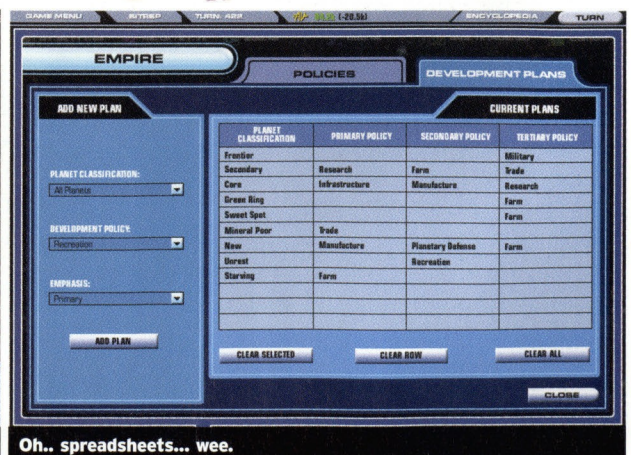
Unfortunately, getting the hang of it isn't as refined a process. MoO3 has buried its control and feedback in tiny tick boxes three screens deep into the interface



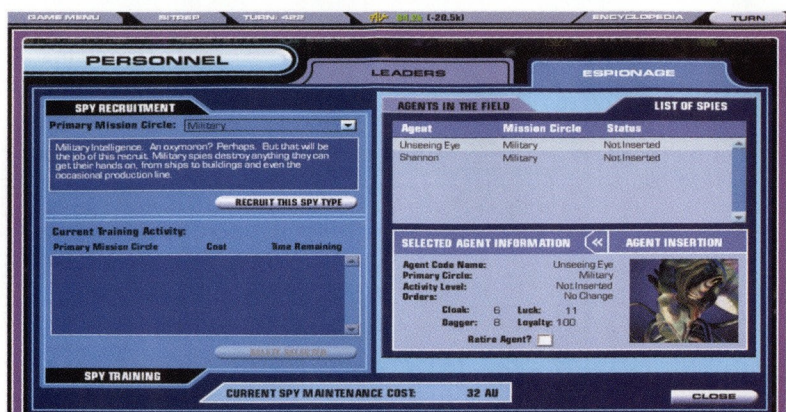
Born under the sign of the Bladder. You are shy but determined...



That doesn't look too diplomatic



Oh.. spreadsheets... wee.



Spies! Now this is more like it.



Optimus Prime and his buddies want a word with you

The spy system is impressive and lets you do everything from assassinations to sabotage

them a carton of WD40 as a gift. And let us not forget the creepy voice of the Harvesters, which lead us to guess where their diplomatic penalties come from.

The diplomatic system is sound and allows for some quite complex deal making, although it tends to fail in the threat department because you don't know what sparked the warning. You have to take stabs in the dark wondering whether they are angry because you've come too close to their borders, or maybe you have been framed, or perhaps there is some dodgy diplomatic shenanigans happening you have no knowledge about. Who knows?

Like the diplomacy, the tech tree is fully featured, but is tainted by a little guesswork. The problem is the tech is long on technobabble but short on stats.

Even though you can steer your development through an impressive tech-tree by choosing which fields to study, such as Energy, Physical Sciences and Economics, without hard figures, you're never quite sure if the tech is going to get through the enemy shields or be enough to fix your fringe worlds dying from starvation. This makes it difficult to plan a proper response: Do you pour everything into research or do you make other plans? Only time, trial and error will tell.

Unfortunately, several aspects of the game echo these issues.

Lost in Space

One of the main problems with MoO3 is it often gives you the sensation of being lost in space.

This is related to a major change that took place during the game's development. Back in those days, every planet had a leader with certain

MOO TIMERS

Although multiplayer can be a blast, you can wait forever for the git on the other side of the world to press the turn button. Luckily, Quicksilver has included a turn timer you can set for as little as one minute to keep things moving along. There are other timers built into the game, but these are to save players from possible "just one more turn" disasters. You can set the timers to go off every few minutes or hours, as gentle reminders that the sun is coming up, or you can set the alarm to go off at a certain time, so you know when you should leave for school or work.

and the manual only scratches the surface, leaving you with an intricate puzzle to solve.

Unless you have inhuman patience you really need to read all the master's notes and then hit the forums to understand the finer points of running your empire. This is a weak trait, since the game is frustrating until you learn some degree of control.

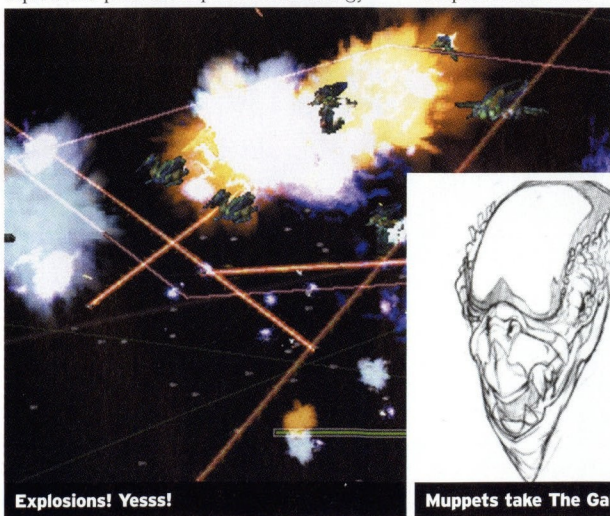
Empires in the Sky

The basic 4X elements of empire building games (eXpand, eXplore, eXplore and eXterminate) are strongly represented in MoO3. Space combat is now in real-time and while the ships are too small on screen, the overall system works well. Huge fleets sweep around the screen and energy weapons colourfully lances across the darkness. Missiles and tiny fighter squadrons pack more punch than energy

beams, but they are uneasily balanced by their lenient destruction. If not for a bug that makes point defence unreliable, the things would be wonderfully flexible for some real strategy. Elements like stealth fields and electronics jamming also adds hit and run tactics to the battlefield. You'll see ships appear out of nowhere and then fade from sight after destroying the escort ships packed with electronic countermeasures and long-range sensors.

The spy system is equally impressive and lets you do everything from assassinate heroic leaders to steal technology, cause unrest or sabotage diplomatic relations.

Diplomacy is also a solid component and the animations for dealing with other races are the most impressive. Seeing Mechanoid arms flailing at the screen tempted me to send



Explosions! Yesss!

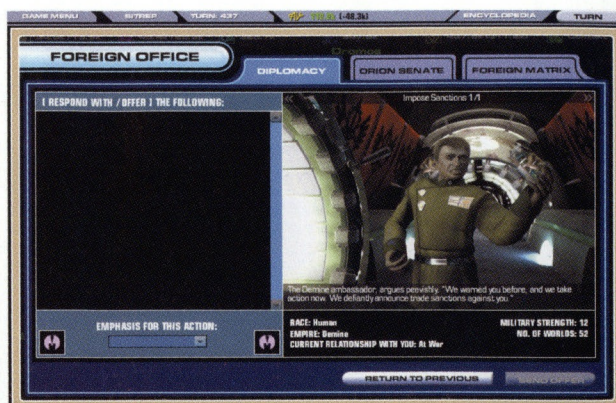


Muppets take The Galaxy





Couple of mosquito coils should take care of this big fella



The ambassador gets peevish. Terrifying stuff



Education is never a waste

is train some spies and update ship designs.

This is made worse by the fact that the enemy AI is pretty passive. The fleets it sends comes in drips and drabs and a bug telling the computer there are never enough transports or colony ships, which means the biggest assaults are with non-

combat ships. At least having to defend yourself from wave after wave of aggressors would give you ready goals, but this isn't the case. As it stands, the game comes down to stabilising your growth and creeping your boarders further out one system at a time.

Also, as the removal of the leaders has left feedback very weak, it means you are never exactly sure how to go about in countering problems, except through trial-and-error or some pretty keen deduction.

All of this has one very serious effect: it all takes away from the feel of the game. Rather than feeling like you're on the bridge of the capital ships in biggest battles since Star Wars, you instead feel like you're locked away in a small room getting war reports via punch cards.

A New Hope

Master of Orion 3 can be likened to a small cube packed with two million simple cogs meshed together in bizarre ways, where everything is connected, but you'll be buggered if you can work out how.

You get the feeling if it all worked, then you'd witness something truly amazing, but, as it stands, the system hums and performs some odd tricks. When your defence guns don't fire, you don't know if it is actually 1) because of a bug in the game, 2) the cloaking on the enemy ship is too good, 3) your electronic counter measure is being bad, 4) your missile detection just missed them, 5) it is a result of losing initiative, or 6) a whim of the invisible captain of your taskforce.

What's worse, is you have no one to ask. If it all ran perfectly then I wouldn't be complaining, but bugs, such as the enemy AI, and some design choices, for example, the Senate voting in a new head of Orion without warning players outside the senate. This last decision suddenly ends your kick-arse game at turn 500, which makes you spit-mad at the game's quirks and peculiarities.

Other times are of inspiration, such as the middle of glorious space combat, or realising your "five minutes more" has stretched into hours - usually after you have turned off the Senate victory option. These are the times when you get a glimpse of Quicksilver's grand plan.

The fact MoO3 was designed to be easily modded, has swung the pendulum widely in the game's favour. Dedicated fans are making the game more playable every day. By the time you read this, Quicksilver would have released the patch that fixes point defence, removed the desire for unnecessary non-combat ships, and set the AI somewhere between the lethargy of present release and the suicidal nature of the beta.

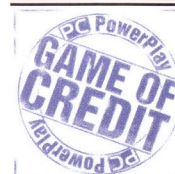
With simple changes, and a couple of the mods, MoO3 is going to transform itself from a puzzle box with enough headaches to make pinhead smile to something that is truly wondrous. Here's hoping.

Timothy C. Best

MACRO VS MICRO

Many fans of the series went nuts when this game came out because it was unlike the first two. They tried to micromanage everything and in the end gave up from lack of fun. There were too many things to do and the damned planet viceroys kept making sweeping changes to their carefully laid orders. Sure, they didn't really know what they were doing and it would have run the planets into the ground and left the empire in debt until the end of time, but that's what they wanted. Be warned, MoO3 is something different to what came before and, without the bugs, this is not necessarily a bad thing.

RATING



FOR

Strategic depth
Strangely addictive
Great potential

AGAINST

Learning curve
Insufficient feedback
AI needs patching

OVERALL

A new style of strategy game, which is a few tweaks away from greatness.

72



V8 Supercars: Race Driver

Developer: Codemasters ■ Publisher: Codemasters ■ Distributor: Infogrames ■ Price: \$89.95 ■ Rating: G8+ ■ Available: Now

Strap yourself in and put in the hard yards



Grid Brothers getting some fine exposure there



It's Reservoir Dogs in orange jump suits and helmets!



This spoiler will give me a much needed advantage as well as being a great chick magnet



You gotta beat the Mini!



SYSTEM

NEED

P3-700
128MB RAM
32MB 3D Video

WANT

P4-2GHz+
512MB RAM
64MB GeForce

MULTIPLAYER

Yes (split screen)

ONLINE

codemasters.com
It's an online
marketing pamphlet
with an available
demo to download.
Fully sick!

For real Aussie V8 touring car fans, Supercar racing involves a lazy Sunday afternoon on the couch, one hand grasping a tinny of the state brew, the other tucked comfortably down the front of a faded pair of Hard Yakka shorts. The next few hours will be spent yelling obscenities at whichever driver just switched camps, informing your mates why Ford pisses all over Holden (or visa versa) and secretly hoping Russel Ingall is just about to do his block and cause another mammoth pile-up.

But for a select bunch of roughly forty guys, V8 racing is more than that. Much more. These forty blokes are strapped into the real cockpits and putting in the real hard yards. They're the ones switching camps, signing on with new teams and doing their blocks that cause mammoth pile-ups (then engaging in fisty-cuffs in a pit-lane). Even for those amongst us who are casual race fans fantasise about that dream job of putting the pedal-to-the metal in a six hundred horsepower V8 - and then getting paid a packet. For those fans, Codemasters's new release may help bring that fantasy to reality - well, cyber reality, at least. V8 Supercars Race Driver attempts to recreate all the hardships, spills and thrills of a proper racing career

(including the pit-lane punch ups) - just without the real-life sweat and tears.

Quality from the start

Codemasters has obviously gone all-out developing V8 Supercars, and one quick spin promptly demonstrates exactly why this title has been so eagerly anticipated by the PC racing community. Although a few problems begin to rear their heads as one delves deeper into play, V8 Supercars, however, looks the part right from the start.

One of V8 Supercars's many fortes is the sheer number of cars, tracks and championships available. There are no less than forty-two real-life racing cars, and roughly the same number of tracks. As far as the Aussie circuits go, seven are recreated in the game. Yes, this includes Bathurst's famous Mountain of Thunder. Others include Sandown, Phillip Island, Eastern Creek and Oran Park.

At last, a Career mode!

Of course, the most enthusiastically anticipated feature of V8 Supercars is the full blown 'Career mode'. This allows the player to truly absorb the atmosphere of professional motor-sports. Over many seasons, you are presented with options to change teams, race in different championships overseas that obviously require different racing cars, win trophies full of

GRAND PRIX LEGENDS OR DAYTONA?

There's no doubt that V8 Supercars is an arcade game through-and-through. This is evident not only in the undemanding driving physics and the extremely forgiving, yet visually pleasing, damage model, but also the simple garage set-up options. Like most car games designed to be driven with a gamepad, V8 Supercars doesn't ideally respond when using a steering wheel setup. The force-feedback consists mainly of rudimentary 'rumble pack' vibrations and no lateral 'road grip' effects. Despite being arcade in nature, V8 Supercars's physics are fast, fun and furious. There's plenty of racing to be had, and it's not hard to do well

cash and, most importantly, make a name for yourself in the industry.

Career mode is intuitive in the racing genre, but unfortunately V8 Supercars doesn't quite live up to the expectations for an open ended career mode. The plot is very linear and offers the player little or no involvement in off-track antics, apart from the ability to select the teams for which you would like to race for, which is, admittedly, very cool. Interaction with other characters is limited to simple cut-scenes over which you have zilch control. It would have been a

Career mode is intuitive in the racing genre, but unfortunately V8 Supercars doesn't quite live up to expectations



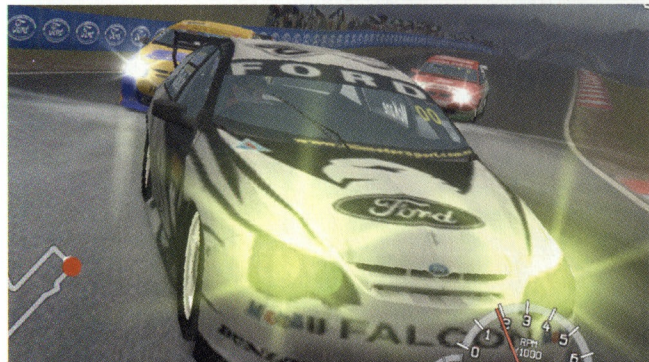
This driving exam is not going well at all



The Huskisson Bowling Club Senior Citizens Race was off to a fine start



Take the handbrake off!



Ford VS Holden - the saga continues...

great addition if the player was given the opportunity to choose their reacted to certain situations. This becomes even more frustrating as Ryan McKane, the character you are forced to play (no, you can't enter your own name), shoots his mouth off with ever increasing arrogance in an equally annoying cocky US accent. But don't go flicking the page just yet! In fairness, it must be pointed out other racing games, with the exception of 'Total Immersion Racing' (TiR), don't feature a Career mode and even by that standard, V8 Supercars's Career mode is far more involved than what's available in TiR.

Touchy, touchy

Despite an excellent arcade physics engine, V8 Supercars can also be criticised for a control system that is far too sensitive. This could easily have been fixed with a simple

sensitivity slider in the controller menu.

The problem is most evident when using a steering wheel with 'wheel handling' set to 'simulation'. I struggle to imagine what Codemasters were even thinking when

they implemented this option. With these settings, the car veers off at right angles with the slightest brush of the steering wheel, and the game becomes quite unplayable. However, with 'wheel handling' set to 'arcade', the sensitivity is reduced and the game becomes, ironically, much more realistic.

This strange type of gamepad-handling, coupled with menu screens you can't use your mouse in, points all to yet another console port. What makes this one different from others, however, is that V8 Supercars possess other qualities that still makes the title worth considering.

At least it looks good...

The graphics are well rendered and a pleasure to view. Each car features a highly detailed, realistic 3D polygon model and the tracks are also brought to

life using vibrant colours and detailed, realistic textures. The only fault one may find with V8 Supercars's visuals are the flat, lifeless sprites used to portray the crowds, but this is hardly noticeable at the speed you'll be driving.

V8 Supercars's much-hyped damage model is solely a visual affair, as the level of damage your car receives does not correspond to any performance drops. This is indicative of the game's console and arcade origins. If judging the damage model for graphics alone, then V8 Supercars is on the upper end of the scale and second only to Papyrus's NASCAR Racing 2003.

A cockpit view is available in every car and most are based upon an unswerving default model, although some cars, such as the mini, have totally unique cockpits. Although the majority possess a similar appearance, it's still a bonus to have a cockpit viewpoint, as it adds a real-life feel to racing.

The sound effects are also note worthy, as each of the forty-two cars sound sufficiently different and retain some of the deep-throated and lumpy gurgle in real-life V8s.

Worth consideration

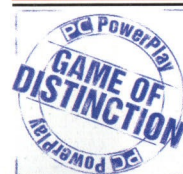
Overall, V8 Supercars Race Driver is a well implemented, detailed arcade racing game. Not only does it offer the casual cyber-gear-head an enjoyable racing experience, the game is also presented with polished graphics, intuitive features and a mass of options when it comes to cars, championships and tracks. Although many will be slightly let down by the much-glorified career mode, Codemasters's latest release is a sure to impress many racing fans of the closed circuit and arcade category. V8 Supercars is certainly jostling with the leaders of the pack.

Victor Webster

ARTIFICIAL STUPIDITY

The AI in V8 Supercars show some promise, although it's ultimately let down by glaring flaws. It's pleasing to see the AI fight amongst themselves, jostle for position, and block your overtaking lines. However, it can be argued they're overly aggressive and just plain bad drivers. For example, starting a race at Bathurst will see you driving through a pile of detached front and rear bumpers, as the AI cars in front of you all ram each other off the starting line. Likewise, the AI brakes FAR too soon into many corners, leaving the unsuspecting player to slam right up their backside.

RATING



FOR

Great graphics
Tons of tracks & cars
Career mode

AGAINST

Stupid AI
Touchy controls
Console port

OVERALL

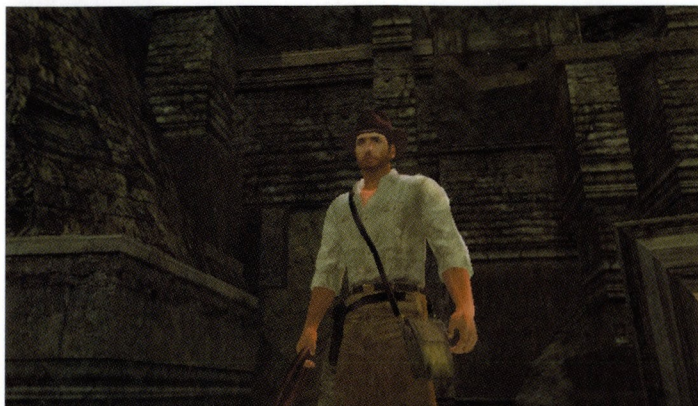
It may not live up to the hype but it can't be denied, it's still lots of fun and worth looking out for.

84

Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb

Developer: The Collective ■ Publisher: Lucasarts ■ Distributor: EA Australia ■ Price: \$89.95 ■ Rating: M15+ ■ Available: Now

Harrison Ford will always be Indiana Jones... oh, and Han Solo



This hat is certainly tipped at a rakish enough angle... OK I'm ready



Steady does it or you'll spend 40 minutes getting back up there again



Nazi's. I hate those guys...



What in the name of arse is that?

BRING BACK CLOTH MAPS

The manual is peppered with quaint anecdotes to remind us of Indy's connection to Marcus Brody, his father, and others. It also includes memorabilia from previous film outings. All this information is presented in a personal diary style, amid a mish-mash of writings, diagrams, maps and clippings. The content of the manual is excellent, so it's a pity the best Lucasarts could do was a black and white pamphlet. Lucasarts, if the game box is nearly empty - make the packaging smaller!!

SYSTEM

NEED

P3-733
Windows 98 - XP
128MB RAM
Geforce 256

WANT

P4-1GHz+
256MB RAM
Geforce 4

MULTIPLAYER

No

ONLINE

mummytombs.com
Find where Otzi the Iceman or Lenin is currently on display by clicking on the Mummy Locator.



The Man named after his dog returns in a fast-paced romp through an often frustrating, but ultimately pleasant jog through a Hollywood backlot. Set sometime before the film, Indiana Jones and The Temple of Doom, The Emperor's Tomb has Indy chasing the Dragon's Heart - a talisman of great power buried with the first Emperor of China. The man manages to travel around the world in search of the mystical Dragon's Heart - with the express purpose of keeping it out of the wrong hands... no matter how often that seems to backfire.

The Collective has done a fine job in level designs, as this is one of the better designed action games I've seen. There are still the obvious levers to pull and traps to avoid, but that's what we expect from Indiana Jones. The castles feel big and imposing in a Wolfenstein kind of way and the jungle ruins are the confusing and haphazard obstacles you'd expect. There's a nice pace to the levels as well, which will lead the player to a conundrum, that once solved, Indy finds himself staring at the opened door that needs opening.

All the Bells and Whistles

The sound is the kind of stunning orchestral score we're used to in the theatre. The Horn melody everyone will recognise as the Indiana Jones motif (Daaa, da, da, DAAAAH...) peaks as a wall shimmering strings every time Indy finds something interesting. Trumpets blast and



Funny, it feels like there's a camera right up my butt

The Emperor's Tomb is a button mashing combat game if ever there was one, where you can string some nice combos together

strings hurtle as gunfire is exchanged. The atmosphere created is exceptional and creates the drama needed in pivotal scenes. The only let down is the musical and voice prompting can wear thin and quickly turns repetitive, which limits replay value.

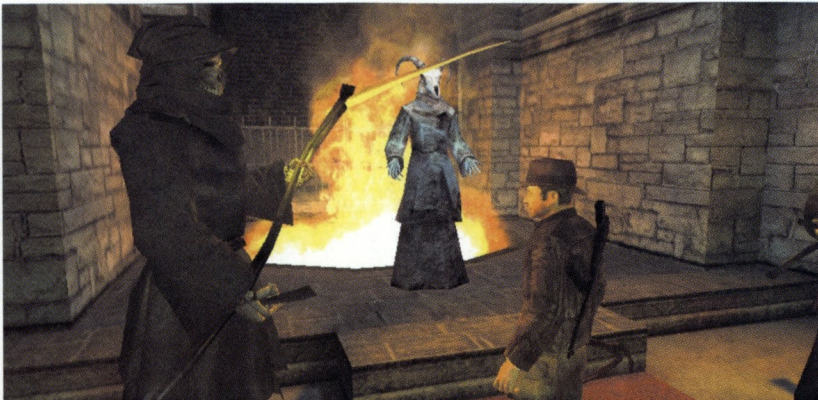
It is this bewildering first impression of sound coupled with visuals that stirred the cockles of the heart. The environments look great and the sound is wonderfully realised. In purely superficial terms, this is an awesome experience. But games

need something more than beautiful sound and visuals; cinematic atmosphere does not necessarily make a great game.

The basic rules of movement is straightforward, with the traditional WASD and mouse configuration. The E button gets a good workout as your Use command. Whenever an interactive element in the map is nearby, an icon appears to tell you what can be pulled down. A quick press of E will even bring up the relative apparatus, for example,



So you think you can just dash away Dr Jones? MWAH HA HA!



I think I'm at the wrong party



Snakes! I hate snakes!



Don't you ever call me Henry Jones Junior again!

the whip. While perfect for the novice, this soon proves frustrating for others wanting a much more thorough interactive experience.

That looks whippable...

Indy's weapon of choice, the whip, is again brought front-and-centre to the experience. It's a useful weapon for disarming opponents, although it is actually impossible to fell an enemy with it - fair enough. To actually get rid of an opponent, useful weapons include handguns, machine guns, as well as chairs, spades, bottles and machetes. The whip is used a lot to swing across chasms using various gargoyles and the like... with the help of a whip icon in the top right-hand corner, of course.

The Emperor's Tomb is a button

SAVES NOT HERE, MAN

The lack of any mid-mission save option is a brave move by The Collective. Since the game is a succession of simple combat and deft control events, there is very little to challenge the experienced gamer. The saving grace (boom, boom) is the game doesn't have a quick save option in the middle of a "chapter". The levels seem just the right length - just long enough to build some excitement, while not too long to inspire resentment of repetition. The threat of death - and a restarting a level - is enough to inject some excitement into The Emperor's Tomb.

mashing combat game if ever there was one. Using the different direction keys with the left and right mouse buttons result in different actions. Separate attacks are designated to the left and right mouse buttons and you can string some nice combos together. Adding some Hollywood pizzazz to play underlines the lack of ammunition in the game. Two shots of a handgun can put a Nazi down, but if you prefer (or are forced) to go at it with bare knuckles, expect extended fistfights with some hefty physical encounters.

"I'm gonna be very rich..."

Developers who don't try to marry the two Pastimes of Action into one complete world, end up balancing the Combat Sections with the Puzzle Sections. The Emperor's Tomb clearly separates the two. When there's baddies to kill that's all you get to do. If you need to think about a puzzle, there's no one else IN the game until you solve it, by which time you'll have run into a roomful of Nazis again. The game feels pretty contrived and formulaic, mostly because the pacing is so predictable.

The puzzle sections involve actions like jumping chasms, pulling switches and avoiding crocodiles to reach the next exit. The more involved puzzles require Indy to manipulate the world in more involved ways. One such place is a library in a Prague Castle, where the chandelier must be progressively raised in order to enable Indy to "whip" his way up to the top of this user-unfriendly library.

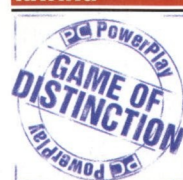
"...If I ever get out alive."

For the most part, the camera is well implemented and allows for different angles of action as they unfold. If you can't see your assailant, you can pan the mouse-controlled camera around and make it a side-on Virtua Fighter style affair. One minor annoyance is the camera is rather unintuitive. Should Indy end up back-to-a-wall (after having to jump a ledge, for example), the camera swings madly away, to avoid the screen being blurred by the virtual firmament. This is disastrous in tight spaces as the constantly changing camera angle conflicts wildly with the Forward command maintaining Forward on-screen. The unfortunate result is an unnerving sense of vertigo when circling in a tight space.

Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb has all the elements of a great game. It stars a well-known, interesting character and features an exciting storyline, the basic game mechanics are geared toward the accessible, and the level design and atmosphere are excellent. Initial impressions of a highly polished and ultimately shallow experience gave way to a more moderate view: here's a game designed for the novice, that while offering next to nothing in replay value or multiplayer is, nonetheless, balanced so the missions are still exciting, but easy going. In the end, this game is a fun but short-lived romp.

John Dewhurst

RATING



FOR

Hollywood action
Stunning music
Indiana character!

AGAINST

Simplistic design
Little replay value
Highly repetitive

OVERALL

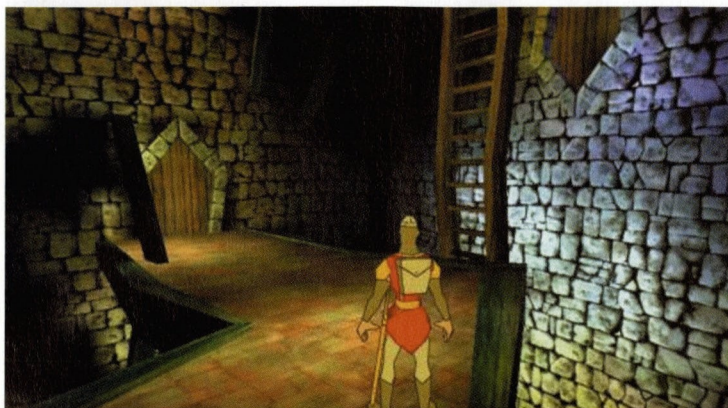
Indy doing what he does best: kicking baddie butt... Like Hollywood, the game doesn't tax the brain.

80

Dragon's Lair 3D

Developer: Dragonstone Software ■ Publisher: Ubi Soft ■ Distributor: Ubi Soft ■ Price: \$89.95 ■ Rating: G8+ ■ Available: Now

It's time for Dirk to get a new girlfriend



I know this door is going to get me into trouble



A cough lolly should get rid of that nasty cough



Riverdance: Dragon's Lair



I bags the knight



One false step, and I'll be... D'oh!



Mountains of gold, and he's still not happy?!

SYSTEM

NEED

P3
64MB RAM
16MB 3D Videocard
700MB HDD

WANT

P3-800
128MB RAM
32MB 3D Videocard
1.5GB HDD

MULTIPLAYER

No

ONLINE

www.pocketcalculatorshow.com
Remember the other 80s' throwback, the pocket calculator? Radical chick magnet stuff!

A long, long time ago, in a land far, far away, there existed a place and time called the 80s, a time of bad music, worse clothes and really big hair. In 1983, Michael Jackson was busy telling us to Beat It and Men at Work introduced the world at large to the land Down Under. Meanwhile, the gaming community was given something truly phenomenal to obsess about. Veteran animators and producers, Don Bluth and Gary Goldman, two men responsible for such hits as The Secret of Nimh, Titan A.E. and The Land Before Time decided it was time to experiment and bring their vision of a Saturday morning cartoon you can control to digital life. Doubtless, either man realised the extent to which the gaming public would embrace their baby. To say that Dragon's Lair was a runaway success would be a severe understatement - reports claim the game managed to pull in over \$3 million in the first week of release - that's a hell of a lot of coins. Dragon's Lair was also further

honoured by being placed in the Smithsonian Institute, making it one of only two arcade games featured - the other is Pac-man, if you're interested.

Daphne is still a ditz

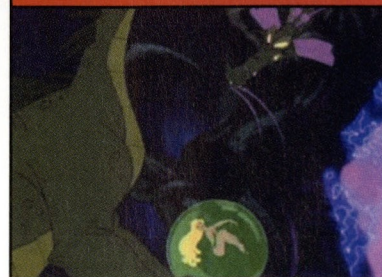
You'd think after 20 years Dirk may have wised up and realised dating a rather vapid and kidnap-prone Princess is more trouble than it's worth. Maybe she's hot to trot in the royal sack, but come on, she'd better be really good if you're going to risk certain death every few weeks to rescue her from an evil wizard and his tame dragon. Cynicism aside, maybe they're really in love. That has to be it. Love. Sigh. Anyway, the plot is simple and may sound a little familiar to anyone who played the original Dragon's Lair. Princess Daphne, Dirk the Daring's perky and disturbingly pointy breasted love interest is kidnapped by evil wizard, Mordoc, and his fearsome pet dragon, Singe. Dirk must brave around 250 trap filled rooms in Mordoc's castle to retrieve his ladylove and put a stop to the evil of Mordoc - until the next time he rears his ugly head. Instead of creating a totally new game, developers Dragonstone Software have opted to remake the original game with a few major differences. Not only is the game in beautiful 3D, you can now actually play it as well.

Run Dirk, Run

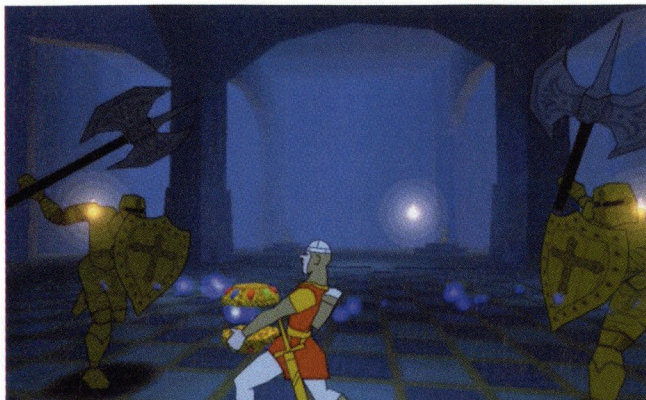
The original Dragon's Lair looked fantastic, but it had a little problem when it came to player participation - all the player could do

NOSTALGIA

Although the majority of the game has been revamped for the 3D era, Dragonstone Software has opted to keep the cutscenes and music from the original game. Aside from the fact these original scenes add to the nostalgia of the game, it's also hard to do any better. After watching the intro you can't help but be drawn into the world of Dragon's Lair. The music is a kitsch mix of orchestral "action" music and perfectly compliments the game. Don't be surprised if you start humming the tunes to yourself at inappropriate moments.



was wait until the screen instructed them to perform a split second action. If they failed to hit the sword button or move the joystick in the correct direction at the preordained time it was game over. No wonder it made money, you had to spend hundreds of dollars just to memorise the sequence of



Decisions decisions...



I think I liked the last door better



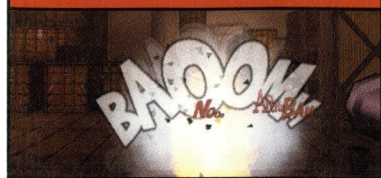
Erm, what is it?



Ungh! Even my manly knight arms are straining!

CELL SHADING

This is a technique by which images are flattened by shading them with large cells of colour, thereby, simplifying the image and giving it the look of an animated cartoon or comic. Currently, only a handful of PC games utilise cell shading including *Dragon's Lair 3D* and the soon to be released *XIII*, which is based on a Belgian comic series of the same name. If the current console fad is any indication of future trends, then we should be swamped with cell shaded titles by the year's end. Whether this is a good or bad thing remains to be seen. Is cell shading the style of the future or is it simply lens flare for 2003?



events. The transition to 3D has brought with it a host of new abilities for Dirk, all of which are vital if Dirk wishes to save Daphne. In the fashion of other action/adventure games, you will use a standard keyboard/mouse control system, so Dirk can now walk, run, jump, fight, shoot, sneak, roll, climb and block. Also after picking up the right dragon essences,

which are special powerups dotted throughout the levels, he can also glide, see the invisible and perform a special whirlwind attack. Each one of these skills are needed to navigate through the trap and monster filled rooms of Mordoc's castle. Traps and enemies range from incredibly easy - when there's only a single lever in a room it's not hard to work out you need to pull it to open the door - to fiendishly difficult combinations of memory, lightning reflexes and perfect timing. The first enemies Dirk encounters en-masse, the cute and purple Giddy Goons are absolute pushovers, only requiring a few hits to kill, but later, Crypt Creeps and Knights make for some tough competition. Unfortunately, the fighting engine is a little too simple for a game in which combat is so prevalent. Initially, Dirk only has access to a single attack - the slash. Later in the game, when he finds the correct powerups, Dirk can also perform a powerful whirlwind slash or shoot a crossbow, but this doesn't really fix the problem. The addition of a few more fighting animations or the ability to perform special combos could have taken combat from being something rather mundane and repetitive to something really quite fun.

Look into the camera

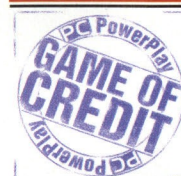
For the most part the move to 3D has been a success for the most part as the new levels and cell shaded characters look fantastic. At the current time there aren't too many PC games utilising cell shading but developers who are considering it should have a look at *Dragon's Lair 3D* as a fine example of how to

do it right. Unfortunately, the game is saddled with the same flaw that plagues so may third-person games - a shoddy camera. For the most part, the camera works fairly well and can be controlled by the player to get the best angles. However, the problem really comes to the fore when Dirk enters a room full of objects. Many of these rooms require Dirk to sneak, run and jump over gaps and obstacles and the camera constantly trying to get out of the way to terrain doesn't make it easy. Players will often find themselves disappearing as they move towards a wall that the camera decides is too close or will lose all sense of scale and any helpful field of view as the camera zooms to a point directly above their head for no readily apparent reason. To add insult to injury, some puzzle rooms lock the camera in a set position, effectively blocking off half your field of view. There also seems to be some problems with the clipping in certain rooms so don't be surprised if you find yourself being perfectly lined up for a jump to a swinging rope only to see it pass through Dirk's body as he plunges to his doom floors below.

As a standalone title, *Dragon's Lair 3D* is too flawed to make it a real classic or must have, but as a trip down memory lane, it's a masterpiece of nostalgia.

Daniel Wilks

RATING



FOR

Looks fantastic
Nostalgia
Excellent puzzles

AGAINST

Bad camera
Clipping problems
Frustrating

OVERALL

Too flawed to be a classic, but still a great trip down memory lane.

70

Championship Manager 4

Developer: SI Games ■ **Publisher:** Eidos ■ **Distributor:** Infogrames ■ **Price:** \$99.95 ■ **Rating:** G ■ **Available:** Now

2D is the new 3D! Or is it?

Friday
9.8.2002
18:00

Huddersfield Town

10th in English Second Division

Squad

Staff

Finances/Information

Fixtures

Transfers

View ▾

Players (Selection View)

Selection ▾ Filter

	Pld	Inf	Name	Position(s)	Form	Morale	Cond.	Apps	Av R	Value
David Wilgoose			Thorrington, J	AM R	6-7-7-6-7	Superb	32%	-	-----	640K
Leggiss & Cups	S&S		Schofield, D	F LC	7-7-7-7-6	V Good	100%	-	-----	128K
Notions & Clubs	FC	Link	Booth, A	S C	8-8-5-7-8	V Poor	100%	-	-----	170K
Screen History	S&S	Win	Holland, C	M C	7-7-7-7-6	V Poor	100%	-	-----	870K
Game Options	MC		Irons, K*	M C	6-6-6-7-7	Superb	100%	-	-----	880K
			Moses, A	D RC	5-6	Superb	100%	-	-----	150K
	D&M		Sharp, R	D&M L	7-6-6-6-6	V Good	100%	-	-----	128K
	DC		Younds, E	D&M C	7-6-6-7-6	V Good	100%	-	-----	160K
	MC		Heery, T	D&M R	7-6	Superb	100%	-	-----	128K
	S&S		Brown, N	D/S C	8-7-7-8-6	Good	100%	-	-----	138K
	S&I		Senior, P	GK	7	Okay	100%	-	-----	128K
	FC		Stead, J	F RC	7-6-7-6-7	V Good	100%	-	-----	128K
	GK		Bevan, S	GK	6-7-6-7-6	Superb	100%	-	-----	1210K
	MC		Mattis, D	M C	7-7-7-6-8	V Good	100%	-	-----	128K
			Clarke, N	D C	-	V Poor	30%	-	-----	138K
			Evans, G	D&M L	-	Superb	30%	-	-----	128K
	S&A	Link	Labarthe, G	F R	6-7-6-6-7	Okay	100%	-	-----	128K

Positions

GK

DC

FC

MC

D&M

D&M L

MC

D&M C

MC

FC

RC

S&I

S&A

S&S

S&S

Win

Loss

Draw

S&S

S&S

S&S

S&S

The mighty Huddersfield! Thorrrington is a star in the making

Friday
9.5.2002
19.00

4. Patrick Vieira (Arsenal)

Defensive Midfielder (Centre, French 158 caps/3 goals, Age 26)

Profile

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David
Wildgoose

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Physical

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Agility 13
Balance 17
Jumping 18
Pace 14
Stamina 19
Strength 19
Goalkeeper Rating 3
Condition 90%
Preferred Foot Right
Morale Superb

Selection Details

Injuries

Name

Bans

Name

International Instr.

Name

Fitness

Match fit

Statistics (Form: 77778)

Non Competitive
League
Cup
Continental
International
Overall

Apps
6
-
-
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1
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Gls
0
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Asss
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Pass
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50 %
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Fouls
7
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Fk Ag
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Av R
7.00

8.00

Ah, Paddy, ever the model of consistency

[illegible]

Vierra's personality is like a bad Stallone film

Sunday 11.00 1800

40% full

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English Second Division promotion odds from Sporting Life

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Grice loan return

Not Wrexham accepts bid warning

Paul Scott accepts his warning

Fri 9th Aug 22.15

Crews loan Roger

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English Second Division promotion odds from Sporting Life

Date: Sunday 11th August 2002

Status: Read

Cardiff and Bristol City have been made 7-4 joint favourites to gain promotion from the English Second Division this season.

The rest of the main contenders are priced at: 5-2 - Brentford, 5-1 - Huddersfield, 6-1 - Wigan and 8-1 - Q.P.R.

The bookmakers think that you are one of a number of teams in with a serious chance of promotion. They feel that as long as you perform to your capabilities there is no reason why you shouldn't be in a promotion spot come the end of the season.

Eek, Huddersfield are S-1 on to be promoted! The pressure's on...

Eek, Huddersfield are S-1 on to be promoted! The pressure's on...

been to point out that the intention behind such changes was to emphasise different aspects to make the game more realistic and, as a consequence, the results more plausible. To

ODDS

Although it's not possible to bet on the outcome of matches, you do, however, receive at the start of each game a news report informing you of the bookmakers' odds for the upcoming championship. It's quite a thrill to see your own team getting heavily backed to achieve promotion from the English 2nd Division. In a multiplayer game, you could even arrange your own betting based on these odds!

thus leaving you with little idea of why your chosen tactics succeeded or failed.

The text commentary has always been part of CM's charm. Suspension of disbelief was made easy because you had to imagine every goalmouth incident, every dubious offside decision, every horrendous foul, and every cup-winning strike. Seasoned players could also learn to recognize the subtle clues the text provided as to how and why your team was winning or losing. You didn't need to see what was going on since the commentary engine was powerful enough to illustrate everything that mattered.

So why the move to a 2D engine? Well, it's marginally more exciting, for start; actually seeing the ball bulge the back of the net does make those injury time

SYSTEM

NEED
P3-600
64MB RAM
300MB HDD

WANT
P4-1GHz
256MB RAM
600MB HDD

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

ONLINE

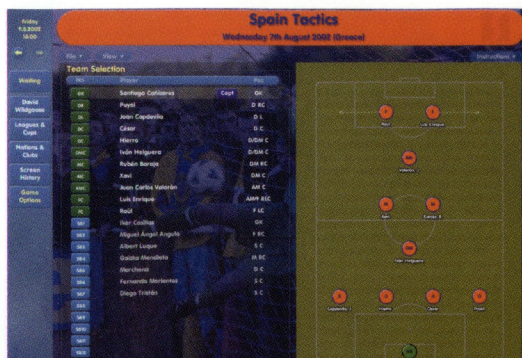
www.sigames.com
Join the vociferous
and evenly split
debate in the forums
over whether
Championship
Manager 4 is a step
forward or back.

If soccer is the world game, as Les and Johnny are wont to say, then the Championship Manager series is indeed the world's game. The distinguished SBS pundits also refer to the sport as the beautiful game, but no sane person would ever think that of CM. It is, after all, little more than a spreadsheet. But it's the deepest, most compelling spreadsheet you're ever likely to encounter, especially if you understand and appreciate the nuance and complexity of football's many strategic and tactical considerations. It's the soccer fan's ultimate dream. But are you an Arsene Wenger or a Terry Venables?

Or, more to the point, given CM4's mixed reception by its legion of fans the world over, is this new version fit for the Champions League or merely the preliminary Oceania World Cup qualifiers? It's an issue that's divided the CM community, with many claiming the "new features" of this fourth iteration take a retrograde step and remove much of the influence an astute manager once had over the running of his team. The response from developer SI Games has

me both arguments seem valid, so let's analyse them in more detail.

The most controversial alteration is found in the match engine, specifically the addition of a 2D view to complement the tradition text descriptions of each match. To those unfamiliar with the CM oeuvre, this may seem more than slightly ridiculous. We've been visiting 3D gameworlds for some eight years now, so surely the implementation of a simplistic 2D view is hardly startling stuff. I mean, there have been plenty of other football management games that have portrayed the action in 3D, so why complain? If anything, the complaint should be about how it's taken this long (four cardinal versions of the game, plus countless seasonal updates over a period of years well into double figures). All well and good, except, of course, that every management game that has attempted a 3D match engine has been utter crap precisely because they attempted a 3D match engine. On the surface, 3D appears more realistic, but it can never capture what really happens on a football pitch.



winners even more satisfying. It's also still sufficiently abstract to remain believable, thus denying the perennial bugbear of 3D depictions. But I'm not convinced it adds any useful information to be helpful in making your management decisions. Sure, you can see that your defender lost his man in the build up to that terrible goal, but the old text commentary would have told you the same thing. And, sure, you can now see the acres of space the opposition is conceding down the flanks and adjust your strategy to exploit it, but again it's something the smart player would have discerned from the commentary.

In fact, the introduction of the 2D match engine is accompanied by a marked decrease in the amount of text commentary. The 2D view only pops up during certain incidents, meaning you'll note there are plenty of shots on goal recorded in the match stats that aren't featured in the highlights. There's this nagging feeling that you're not being told everything that's going on – a sensation the diminished commentary only exacerbates. In the end, it comes across as an uneasy compromise between the developer's desire to inject a fresh new feature and the player's need to feel in control. Overall, it's one step forward and one step back, and ultimately it's not going to please everyone, CM veterans least of all.

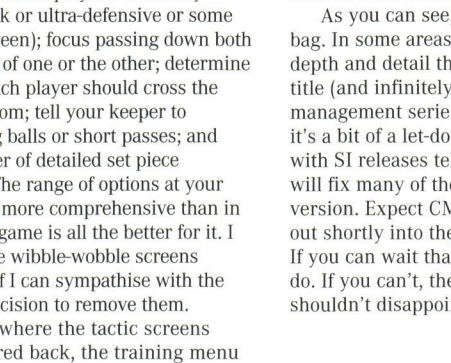
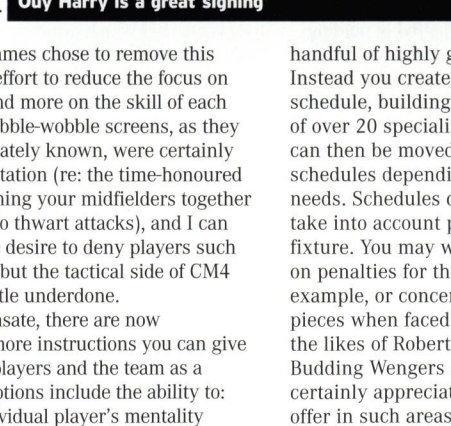
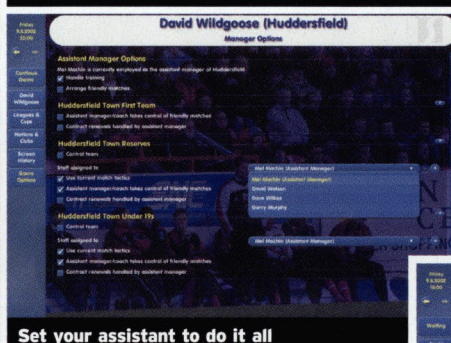
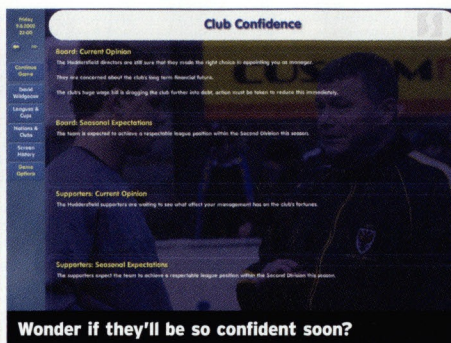
Then there's the absence of the much-loved With and Without Ball screens in the tactics menu. Again, CM veterans are going to be gnashing their teeth in disgust. Here you could specify whereabouts on the pitch you wanted individual players at any one time, depending on the location of the ball.

You could, for example, instruct your opposite side winger to hang near the sideline awaiting a switch in play. In their

wisdom, SI Games chose to remove this feature in an effort to reduce the focus on base tactics and more on the skill of each player. The wibble-wobble screens, as they were affectionately known, were certainly open to exploitation (re: the time-honoured tactic of bunching your midfielders together in the centre to thwart attacks), and I can appreciate the desire to deny players such cheap tactics, but the tactical side of CM4 now feels a little underdone.

To compensate, there are now significantly more instructions you can give to individual players and the team as a whole. New options include the ability to: assign an individual player's mentality (gung ho attack or ultra-defensive or some where in-between); focus passing down both flanks instead of one or the other; determine from where each player should cross the ball and to whom; tell your keeper to distribute long balls or short passes; and give all manner of detailed set piece instructions. The range of options at your disposal is far more comprehensive than in CM3, and the game is all the better for it. I still miss those wibble-wobble screens though, even if I can sympathise with the developer's decision to remove them.

However, where the tactic screens have been pared back, the training menu



UNDOCUMENTED FEATURES

Like every other cardinal iteration of CM, this one is beset by a host of bugs. The 2D match engine includes many such undocumented features: players running away from the ball, getting confused and passing repeatedly to each other, obvious offside not picked up by the linesmen, etc. Unfortunately, the increased flexibility offered by the new training options is also somewhat undermined by a host of peculiarities: custom schedule buttons linking to the wrong schedules and injured players doing no training at all complaining that it's too intensive, to name but two. The training bugs are perhaps the most problematic, since you feel you can't trust any changes you've made to the default schedules. Which kinda defeats the whole point, I'd say.

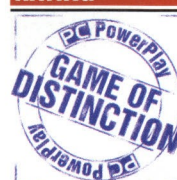
has been beefed up considerably. No longer do you merely assign coaches to a

handful of highly generalised tasks. Instead you create an entire weekly schedule, building the training regime out of over 20 specialised routines. Players can then be moved between the various schedules depending on their individual needs. Schedules can also be fine-tuned to take into account particularities of each fixture. You may want to work extra hard on penalties for that upcoming cup tie, for example, or concentrate on defending set pieces when faced with a team featuring the likes of Roberto Carlos or Beckham. Budding Wengers and Farinas will certainly appreciate the greater depth on offer in such areas.

As you can see, CM4 is a bit of a mixed bag. In some areas, it boasts far more depth and detail than any previous CM title (and infinitely more than any other management series), but in other areas, it's a bit of a let-down. Past experience with SI releases tells us the next update will fix many of the problems in this version. Expect CM4 Season 03/04 to be out shortly into the next European season. If you can wait that long, I'd suggest you do. If you can't, then this initial release shouldn't disappoint too much.

David Wildgoose

RATING



FOR

Realistic
In-depth
Addictive

AGAINST

Needs patching
2D engine has flaws
No wibble-wobbles!

OVERALL

Despite numerous problems, CM remains the best management game around.

84

IL-2: The Forgotten Battles

Developer: 1C:Maddox Games ■ Publisher: Ubisoft ■ Distributor: Ubisoft ■ Price: \$69.95 ■ Rating: G8+ ■ Available: Now

Take the scenic route to WW2... if it even starts



Houston, I think we have a problem!



Is that a cockpit or a birdcage?



Lay waste to some fields of grass.



We can't read Russian, but we think it says something rude.

SYSTEM

NEED
P3-800/AMD 700
256MB RAM
32MB 3D Videocard
1.1GB HDD space

WANT
AMD 1800
512MB RAM
64MB GeForce

MULTIPLAYER

No

ONLINE

www.ubi.com/US/GamingZone/
Create your own server online, or more typically, join games at the address above.

Just when it looked like Germany's original 'Shock and Awe' campaign was going to succeed, Adolf Hitler in a moment of brilliance decided uncle Jo Stalin had to go. The Soviet Air Force's new aircraft, the Ilyushin 2, proved instrumental in holding back the German advance and in driving back Hitler's invading forces to allow the Soviet 'liberation' of Eastern Europe, hurrah. IL2 the game was, and still is, a hard core flight simulator fans dream, but due to the game's variety of setup and difficulty options, the game can be shared with even the most uncoordinated novice. Forgotten Battles has taken the level of simulation up another level by giving the pilot even more control over their environment, but it still retains the ease of use of the original.

Multi Engine Mayhem

One of the most significant improvements Maddox has made to IL2 is the implementation of multi engine aircraft that

allows separate control over each powerplant. This, of course, has opened the way for two flyable heavy bombers to be included in your arsenal. The Heinkel He111 in three variants, and the mostly amusing Russian TB-3 which is a relic from the early thirties complete with open cockpit, tea lady and requisite doilies on the backs of the gunners chairs.

In keeping with this, your engine controls are also more detailed with advanced radiator settings, prop pitch and other real-world touches for realism buffs. These really come into play when you're flying a four prop bomber with an engine out as fine adjustments are needed to keep your plane balanced. Some aircraft also have access to War Emergency Power, which was usually some form of nitrous oxide or oil/water injection to give the pilot an extra 10% of grunt when needed. However, you can run the risk of blowing your engine if you use such boosters when advanced realism settings are activated.

Of course, the inclusion of multi-engine bombers has opened up other possibilities as well and players can now take on the role of defence gunners if it tickles their fancy. The different gun positions can be cycled through with a keystroke or each position can be assigned to a key for quick access. The guns themselves are aimed with the mouse and not the joystick, which gives you the advantage of being able to fly and defend your aircraft at the same time! There is, however, one rather silly thing about the implementation of the defence

guns: the intensity of their muzzle flash is such that as soon as the gun(s) are fired your target disappears behind a wall of flame making it impossible to follow. This is not accurate and may have been created for the sake of online play balancing. Bombers also mean bomb sights and both the He111 and the TB-3 have their own unique and accurately modeled versions.

New Model Runout

Bombers aren't the only new thing with wings in IL2. Flight fans can look forward

NEED FOR SPEED

The sensation I experienced speeding at low level is the best yet in a flight sim. I enjoyed whizzing past excellent ground textures, individual trees, small stands of trees and whole forests of trees. Flying over vast cities, especially Moscow, which has 500,000 buildings in the sim. I also shot through fog, rain and snow, and all with a smooth frame rate without any s-s-stuttering on my AMD 1800XP, Windows 98 SE, 512MB RAM and Geforce 3 Ti500 test system. As beautiful as the details are and can be enjoyed in a sedate and fluid flight, the IL-2, however, is not a civil flight sim. It's a combat sim and, unfortunately, once you add multiple aircraft with the addition of tanks, trucks, ships and anti-aircraft fire the bugs become apparent.



The battle of Leningrad was indeed swiftly forgotten.



Hope those kippers are ready, 'cos we're back home.



Clearly this is before the bombs were dropped.



A yellow nose? Those Russians really are clowns aren't they?



The Greenpeace protestors were swept away in the undertow.

HISTORY IN YOUR PC

The IL-2 series focuses on the action between the Soviet Union and the German Third Reich, during which the Soviets suffered 20,000,000 deaths. Here is a list of dates that will be covered in the game.

22 June 1941: German armed forces enter the Soviet Union.

1941: Smolensk. First German Victories. Battles of Smolensk and Kiev.

1941: Moscow. Operation Typhoon. March to Moscow.

1942: Stalingrad. Bitter hand-to-hand fighting in a city under siege.

1943: Kursk. Operation Citadel. Tank battles at Kursk.

1944: The Crimea. War in the Crimea.

1945: Red Army's march into Berlin.

to enjoying a unique and quite eclectic collection of warbirds. There are over a dozen new flyable aircraft and variants, as well as a host of non-flyables, too. Fighter aces will love the new Russian LA-7, which can be considered the best plane in the game. It manoeuvres beautifully, is heavily armed, powerful and good at all altitudes.

The second best is, arguably, the new Bf-109 K-4, which climbs like a monkey with its arse on fire. New lend lease aircraft, like the P-47 and the Finnish Brewster Buffalo, also add some variety. This vast range also includes the new Me262 and Heinkel162 jets. Oh, I nearly forgot the Hurricanes, Mark1s sold to the

Fins to fight the Russians and Mark2s sold to the Russians to fight the Germans! A quick mention should also be made of the new AI routines controlling these aircraft (the ones you aren't playing). Your opponents are better this time around, using their plane's advantages more effectively and, as a consequence, are more aggressive. However, there are still a few short sighted enemy pilots flying around in circles!

Forgotten Battles?

The first IL2 suffered from having a very static and dull singleplayer campaign, which has, thankfully, now been discarded. The new IL2 has dynamic campaigns that ebb and flow according to both historical reality and the effect of your missions on the battlefield. The title, Forgotten Battles refers to the conflict early in WW2 between Russia and Finland and also Hungary's actions on the eastern front when still in alliance with Germany. You can serve in any of these four country's air forces as a bomber or fighter pilot by choosing your rank, squadron and starting date of your career.

IL2 also ships with an extensive mission/campaign editor allowing players to create their

own static campaign missions. From the outset, IL2 is designed to be easily modifiable, which should please most. Players can also expect to see new aircraft, ground targets and missions/campaigns online (see boxout) Campaign parameters, radio chatter and pilot portraits can also be easily changed.

Dogfight

IL2 ships with Ubi Soft's free online game matching service, which works quite well as long as you have a fast internet connection - most online players tend to be overseas. If you want to play online regularly your best bet is to locate some like minded locals and get your own clans and servers going.

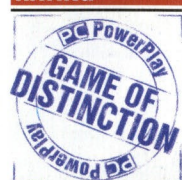
The age old question we always ask of a sequel is "is it worth it?" We'd say IL2's dynamic campaign alone makes it worth a look, and the new planes, bomber action and AI are icing on the cake.

George Soropos



Oh dear, has anyone got any buckets?

RATING



FOR

Hundreds of missions
Best yet WW2 sim
Set your difficulty

AGAINST

Very messy startup
Bugs
Overload of elements

OVERALL

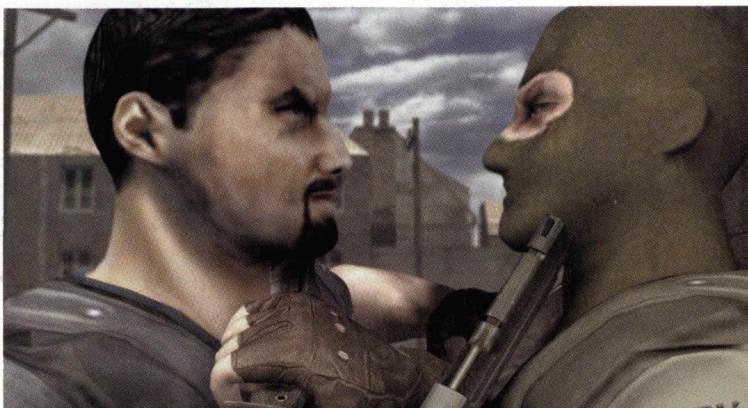
Really the only WW2 combat flight sim you need, but needs urgent attention to the bugs.

80

New World Order

Developer: Termite Games ■ Publisher: Project 3 ■ Distributor: QV Software ■ Price: TBA ■ Rating: MA15+ ■ Available: Now

The battle for Counter-Strike's throne remains a frigid affair



Your... your eyes have a little green in them

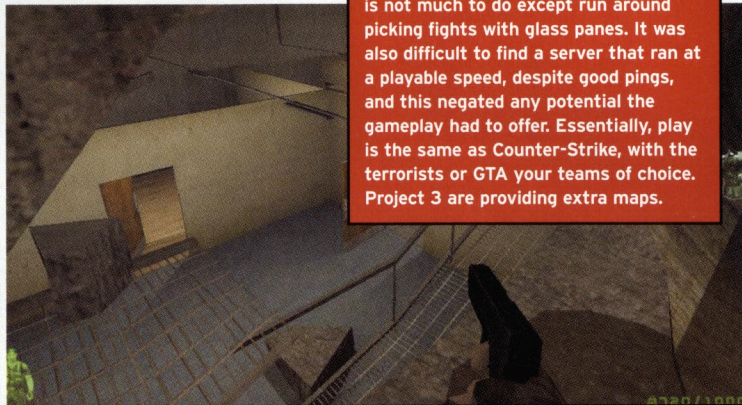


LIFE AFTER SINGLEPLAYER

In an age where dial-ups are becoming extinct, ADSL standard and cable a reality, a game is measured more by the might of its multiplayer aspects than the flaws of its singleplayer component. Thus, there is a chance for NWO to redeem itself. Unfortunately, the servers are ghost worlds and there is not much to do except run around picking fights with glass panes. It was also difficult to find a server that ran at a playable speed, despite good pings, and this negated any potential the gameplay had to offer. Essentially, play is the same as Counter-Strike, with the terrorists or GTA your teams of choice. Project 3 are providing extra maps.



Why, there wouldn't be anything to fear down this dark alley, surely?



This mezzanine level will give me the element of surprise!

SYSTEM

NEED

P3-600
256MB RAM
32MB Videocard
1.5GB HDD

WANT

P3-1.4GHz
512MB RAM
128MB Videocard

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

ONLINE

www.members.shaw.ca/make/method2
Don't know what to do with your surplus chocolate Easter egg foils? Turn it into art!

Project 3 Interactive and Termite games are the quintessential optimists. New World Order (NWO) not only had a ton of potential, but was extremely marketable. The 'hype-machine' started with a bang and had lauded this FPS title as the game to terminate Half-life's reign, execution style. Surely, this was a no lose situation. Absolute trollop! NWO is as fake, irritating and maligned as the sport that shares its namesake. In fact, a couple of hours into this follicle pulling glitch-a-thon, you'll be tempted to throw the game into the same ring as The Rock. If anything, NWO doesn't pose a challenge to Half-life's dynasty and only serves to solidify its already stable and enviable position.

The problems come thick and fast and you will no doubt spend more time dodging these than the bullets in the game. The graphics range from quite pretty to about as aesthetically pleasing as

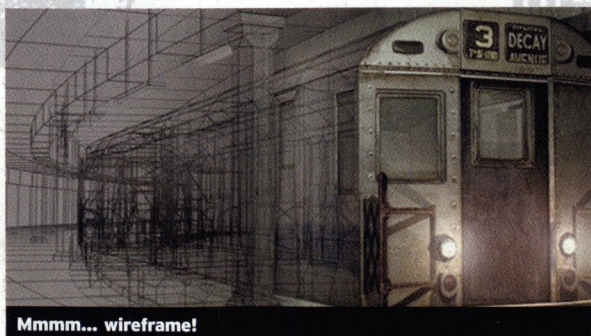
the furry green bits growing on an old orange. The player movements are sticky, the menu system is unpolished, the sound effects are out of sync, there is absolutely no level interactivity and the AI is diabolical. And this isn't half of it. NWO has a struggling frame-rate, regardless of settings, and poor mission construction. The indifferent nature of the problems suggest this is nothing but a cash-in attempt on the 'it' genre. Even some cool weapons, aggressive dialogue and strong multiplayer allegiance cannot save this title from the fate of a garage sale or, more deservingly, council clean up.

When terrorists go bad

Sometime in the near future - and given recent events this is probably just around the corner - terrorist factions had formed a group known as, The Syndicate, which are a successful terror organisation instilling fear around the globe. They are trained mercenaries who, according to the mission briefing, specialise in sabotage, espionage, kidnapping and the all important art of destruction. My dog



Call me Gaylord again and I'll shoot you in the butt



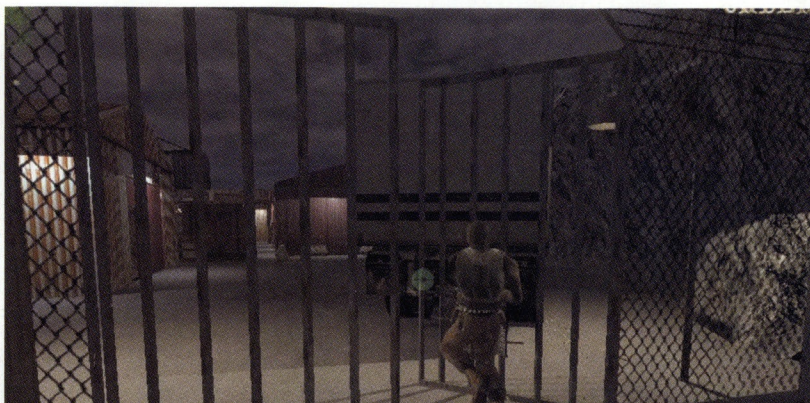
Mmmm... wireframe!

specialises in that as well, making this highly accurate and disturbingly predictable enemy part of a very select group. In order to stop this dream team of devastation, the powers that be form the Global Assault Team. These elite fighters are given orders to exterminate members of The Syndicate, and are rewarded on results borne from the any-means-necessary policy of international policing.

It's frighteningly unoriginal stuff, which basically emulates the basics of Counter-Strike. Things look destined for disaster from the start when you open the instruction book to be greeted with the misspelt words, 'the' and 'near', in the opening sentence. You can argue linguistic ability isn't the crux of the game creating community, but this lack of professionalism radiates throughout the



Nice shadows, lousy architecture



I think someone's stealing your truck...



Hang on, that's not a genuine 16th Century painting... SHOOT IT IN THE HEAD!



Wait, those candelabra aren't real vintage silver... BLOW THEM AWAY!

entire game. In the end, small mistakes make a rather messy whole. The game play is essentially slugging through 12 missions that lean loosely towards certain tasks, such as hostage rescue or kidnapping. Frustratingly, you don't have to complete the tasks but just kill the last Syndicate member before the missions end abruptly.

Send in the clones

Like trying to carve a roast with a blunt tennis ball, finding good points in NWO is going to be a struggle. But to be fair, it isn't

totally unplayable. The training mission is original and there are some interesting level concepts, such as the tunnel where you must weave between abandoned cars in a claustrophobic, and enemy filled environment. Although uninspired, the weapons are, nevertheless, both realistic and fun to unleash, accompanied by some pounding sound effects and powerful results. One interesting new feature is the weapons buying menu initiated, like Counter-Strike, at the beginning of a stage. Rather than purchase solely with money, gamers must also earn a rank befitting the more powerful weapons. This is a nice addition to the genre, but in light of other flaws, simply serves to highlight the games missed potential.

NWO is filled with more bugs than an entomologist's outback dunny. At one stage I jumped the barricade at the level boundary and walked off the map, which freaked out the game and caused the entire affair to restart. In levels where you must rescue hostages, they would sometimes stop and simply moonwalk on the spot, requiring you to being again. At other times, they would roam around behind you passionately head-butting inbound enemy fire and, thus, illustrating the abundant AI flaws. To put the final nails in the coffin, the animations are far from earth shattering (witness guns going through solid concrete) and the sound-effects have the sonic qualities of a curry eating contest in a small room.

Beware of having your kid brother in the room, because Project 3 has targeted a

mature audience with dialogue besieged with harsh profanity and animations drenched with gore. While the majority of gamers will receive these elements with arms wide open, they are poorly implemented. Often, the swearing seems unnecessary and far from the professional standard we are led to believe our hero (Agent Dobbs, by the way) lives. However, don't expect to see this adult material extend into the cut-scenes and music - there are none. This is probably a good thing, considering the game already weighs in at 1.4GB and getting it to actually run smoothly will prove too big a mission for some.

Amateur

Essentially, when you compare Counter-Strike, Ghost Recon, Splinter Cell, Battlefield Earth or Medal of Honour with NWO, its many flaws fail to compete with such ilk. Unfortunately, its good points do little to avenge the designer's utter lack of vision. Similar to its unrealistic shooting physics, NWO is well off target. Like a radar detecting radar that detects a radar for detecting radars, if you think about NWO too hard you will either go blind or bend all your cutlery.

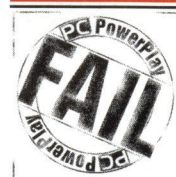
In this day and age, with such a crowded market, can we afford the luxury of accepting weak titles? I think not. There is no excuse for the release of this title in its current state. This is a waste of their money, a waste of your money and quite simply, a miscalculated attempt to woo an entrenched fan base from superior titles.

Chris Stead

GULLIBLE GAMERS BEWARE

If NWO proves anything, it is that gamers cannot allow themselves to be fooled by strong publicity and 'genre love' when seeking their next gaming experience. Precedents are well and truly set and if a title fails to challenge those boundaries, the market will find little room for it. We expect big things from likes of Unreal, WarCraft and the EA sport Sims, but originality will always be a game's most powerful commodity and why the unknown quantities often raise their heads come award season. NWO is not the worst game of all time, but you have to wonder what dynamic saw this title rushed onto the shelves, well before it was completed. At time of writing, the latest patch (1.4) had not fixed the problems stated in this review.

RATING



FOR

Some cool weapons
Interesting levels
The only way is up

AGAINST

Too many bugs
Frame-rate issues
Not as good as rivals

OVERALL

There is little to like in this shameless cash-in. Start, press 'K' and top yourself.

41

Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc

Developer: Ubi Soft ■ Publisher: Ubi Soft ■ Distributor: Ubi Soft ■ Price: \$49.95 ■ Rating: G8+ ■ Available: Now

France says, 'Mercy is for the weak!'

SYSTEM

NEED

P3-600
64MB RAM
32MB Videocard
450MB HDD

WANT

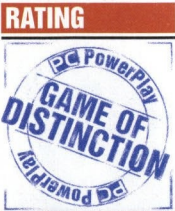
P3-1GHz+
128MB RAM
GeForce 3
1GB HDD

MULTIPLAYER

No

ONLINE

www.ubi.com
We were expecting this to be the site of France's weirdest game developer, but instead, it's about cryogenics, which is even weirder. Get yourself frozen for a fabulous fee!



RATING

FOR

Vibrant gameworld
Funky characters
Sense of humour

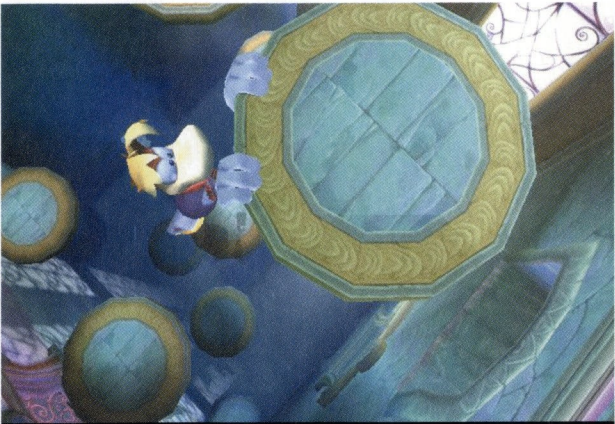
AGAINST

Camera issues
Limited replay
Not very PC

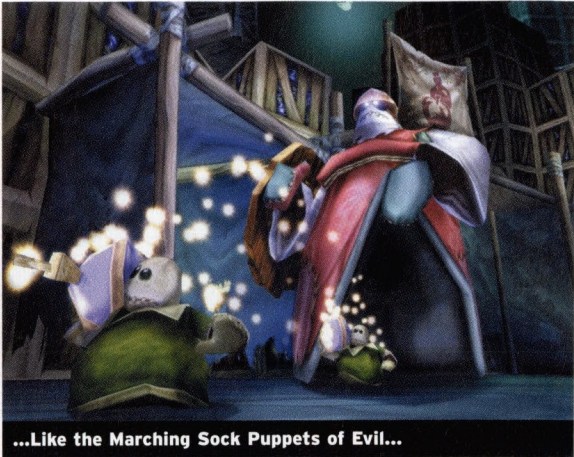
OVERALL

Though it's out of place on PC, this is a quality platformer to keep the kids busy

76



Our hero, facing danger at every turn...



...Like the Marching Sock Puppets of Evil...

Even though 3D platformers have traditionally been cursed with awkward cameras, lacklustre content and difficult control methodologies, Ubi Soft has managed to continue the success of the Rayman franchise with another cheerful, low-fat romp through a cutesy fantasy world peopled by fairies, evil bugs and fart jokes. But its low-impact storyline and family values mean it's obviously not a game for everyone.

The game relies somewhat on previous experience with Rayman's universe as the opening cinematic - while colourful and kind of engaging - doesn't really give much backstory. Basically, the evil black 'Hood' Lums are displacing regular good Lums and its up to Rayman to restore order. Where Rayman 3 works very well is in its integration of game and story. It's a plot-driven adventure - Rayman must track down the evil leader of the Hoodlums and then, owing to the perversities of the

plot, extract him from Globox's belly (that's where the fart jokes come in) - but it never loses the feel of a platformer. There's a points-based rewards system, various powerups and numerous minigames that are unlocked as more points are scored, all helping to keep the action fresh.

Of course, all this exposes Rayman's console roots, and indeed there are some points in the game where the interface will exhort the player to make use of the left analog stick. Indeed, gamepad is the superior control method for Rayman 3, and if you do utilise such a device, there's no need to have the mouse or keyboard handy for extra controls as everything can be done on the pad.

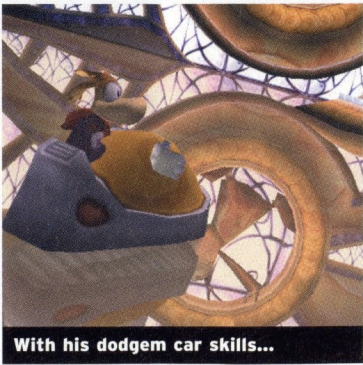
As a sequel, Rayman 3 does offer veterans new control options, including a strafing mode where shots can be curved to sidestep obstacles, hit shielded enemies and solve many of the platform-based puzzles. The game is also much

more combat focused, and with different attack options now available including a charged fist, fist-launched iron jaws and a scythe attack. The fighting is frenzied and kind of satisfying, albeit in a necessarily cute way.

Okay, so it's repetitive - platform puzzle, fight some henchmen, platform puzzle, fight a boss,



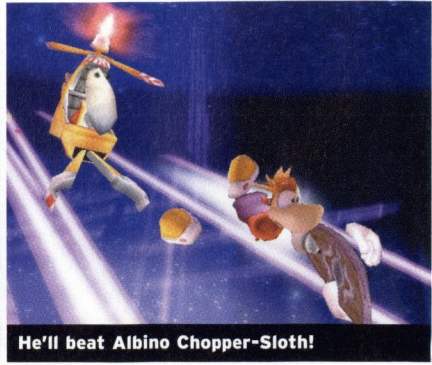
or Sam the Sizzling Fire Monkey of Regret!



With his dodgem car skills...



...and bronze swimming certificate..



He'll beat Albino Chopper-Sloth!

MINIGAMES

Like any good modern console game, Rayman 3 offers rewards to diligent players in the form of minigames. This includes the fairly standard Tennis, but also a rather elegant FPS mode that's quite a bit of fun. Also, within the main game there are numerous different diversionary action elements including on-rails flying segments, a curious shoe-driving sequence and defence of a pirate ship. This variety helps take the curse off the limitations of the platforming model - which is a good thing.

but that's the nature of these types of games. Rayman 3 isn't about innovation, it's about pleasing Rayman fans. There must be Rayman fans out there somewhere - the little armless and legless French hero has sold in the tens of millions. This game is for them.

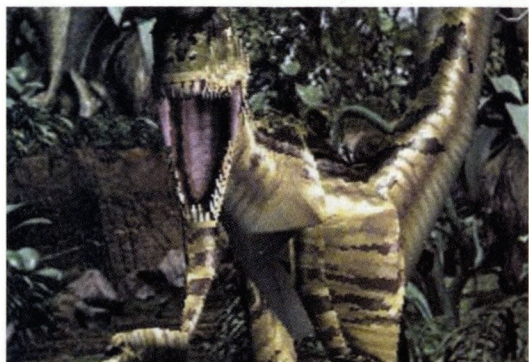
Rayman 3 has been released on all platforms, and while PC shows off the work of the in-game artists, the best with crisp textures and good lighting, this is the kind of game that would be more comfortable to play slumped on the couch rather than sitting up at your PC. But, it might be useful in keeping little cousins or kid brothers out of your hair for a few precious hours. It's wholesome but slightly naughty, and a good chunky of diversionary fun.

Anthony Fordham

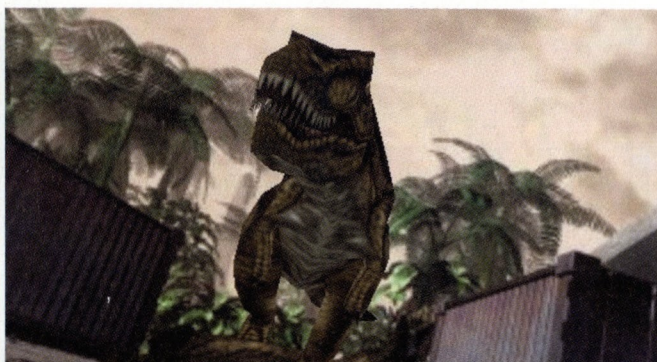
Dino Crisis 2

Developer: THQ ■ Publisher: Capcom ■ Distributor: Capcom ■ Price: \$49.95 ■ Rating: MA15+ ■ Available: Now

Survival horror with scales and smaller brains



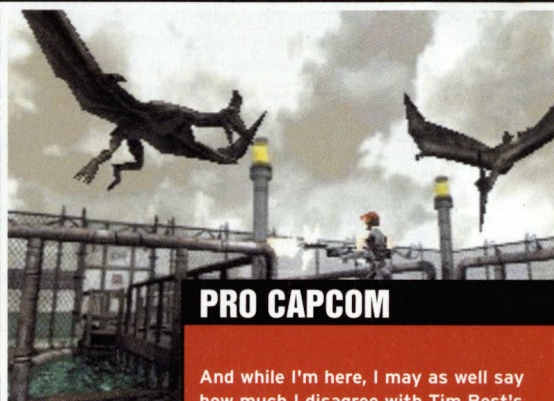
"...I got rhythm..."



"...I got music..."



"...I got my girl..."



PRO CAPCOM

And while I'm here, I may as well say how much I disagree with Tim Best's thoughts (PCPP#86) on the state of the console conversion. Sure, I despise the sloppy port prompting you to hit the 'Start' button as much as the next guy, but mouse support? Seriously? You're kidding, right? Ignoring the issue of Capcom having to re-write the entire game engine to implement such a control method, the fact remains that survival horror titles, such as this, rely upon static screens and skewed camera angles to generate atmosphere. An essential part of horror's appeal (if that's the right word) lies in the sinking feeling that everything's just out of your control. Replacing the 'director's cut' approach of Dino Crisis 2 with a mouse-based third or even first-person scheme would greatly dilute the shock factor on offer here, thereby robbing the game of its core attraction. Sometimes a little less control can be a little more of a thrill.

Yippee, I said to myself the day before deadline, another five-year old PlayStation game (see Breath of Fire 4 over the page)! I ought to be able to bash out this review within the hour - 30 minutes of playing followed by 30 minutes of writing. Easy.

Four hours later - and with Shari growing increasingly agitated at the next desk - I was racing back to base camp, low on ammo, out of medikits and too afraid to stop and see if those velociraptors were still snapping at my heels. In fact, I didn't need to look; I could hear them squawking with delight at what they thought was their next meal. Like a tenacious T-Rex savouring the corpse of a fallen colleague, Dino Crisis 2 had snagged me in a vice-like grip and wasn't keen on letting go. Unlike my poor, recently masticated friend, however, I was enjoying the ride.

To the PC zealot obsessed with vertex shading and ping time, Dino Crisis 2 may seem like an anachronism. It's from Japanese uber-developer, Capcom. It began life on a console. It's a second cousin to Capcom's own Resident Evil, only now the zombies are replaced by giant lizards. It's clichéd, generic, formulaic and even by-the-numbers. Yet, it slips so easily into such a well-worn groove that, much like a Kylie song, you can't help but love it.

There's a cheesy plot that courageously mixes genetic experimentation with time travel. Of course, the dialogue is crap and the characters do some really obviously stupid things (like splitting up unnecessarily in classic horror tradition), but the sillier it gets the more fun it becomes. And after four hours play, I can

safely say it becomes a lot of fun indeed.

Blasting dinosaurs with shotguns is lots of fun. Blasting dinosaurs with flamethrowers and rocket launchers ludicrously downloaded from computers (which conveniently double as save points) is even more fun. The triassic terrors are much fleet of foot than the undead denizens of Raccoon City, thus the combat is frenzied and, particularly when dashing through the frequent jungle trails, relentless to boot. There's even a handful of intense on-rails shooter sequences that break up the action by upping the ante to delirious.

Away from the manic fighting, there are plenty of keys to collect and their retrieval often necessitates much backtracking and the opportunity to rack up more points to buy health and weapon upgrades - a nifty reward system all told. There are also mild puzzle elements that won't overly tax your brain nor block your progress for long. Hardly ground-breaking stuff, of course, but it's drenched in the finest old-school videogame logic - which is kinda the point.

Dino Crisis 2 is far from the most innovative title you'll play this year - indeed, nor was it back in 1998 when originally released - but when you're backed up against a bloodied wire fence with a trio of pterodactyls swooping in for the kill, such matters will be the last thing on your mind. You'll be too busy hammering the keyboard to care.

Like its namesake, Dino Crisis 2 is geriatric, none too bright and hamfistedly violent. But it'll also make you squeal with childish delight.

David Wildgoose



"...who could ask for anything more!?"

SYSTEM

NEED

P3-450
64MB RAM
16MB Videocard
600MB HDD

WANT

Nothing special

MULTIPLAYER

No

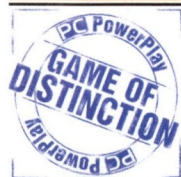
ONLINE

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If you want to frighten our deputy editor, forget mauling her like a T-Rex - be a clown. Check out Dune Buggy the Clown who runs a clown school where you wear ghastly white make-up and pants not seen since MC Hammer.



RATING



FOR

Timeless design
Frantic action
Cheesy story

AGAINST

Not for everyone
Dated technology
Slightly repetitive

OVERALL

Stupid but fun. Like an Arnie movie.

75

Breath of Fire 4

Developer: Capcom ■ Publisher: Capcom ■ Distributor: THQ ■ Price: \$49.95 ■ Rating: G8+ ■ Available: Now

Another console to PC makes for disappointment

SYSTEM

NEED

P2-350
64MB RAM
550MB HDD

WANT

P3
128MB RAM
16MB Videocard

MULTIPLAYER

None

ONLINE

www.capcom.co.jp/capcom-pc

This site is the closest the game gets to any form of online support. And it's all in Japanese! Super fantastic happy lazy funs!



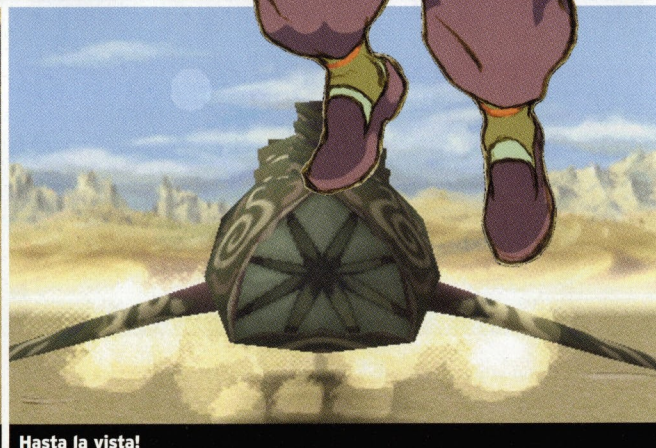
Have you thought about getting a tune up on this thing?



Hasta la vista!



Don't look at me, I'm just a girl!



RATING



FOR

Well, there's... uh...
The... the... um...
Nope. There isn't any

AGAINST

The graphics
The sound
The game

OVERALL

An appalling port
that should never
have happened

45

Breath of Fire 4 is a game the PC doesn't need. We've all had our fair share of half-arsed console ports, but this is just ridiculous. It's a PlayStation1 game originally released in 2001 for god's sake. It wasn't even any good then. In fact, it was pretty bloody terrible. And would it surprise anyone if I said nothing has changed? No. Didn't think so.

The main problem with BoF4 is it simply isn't cohesive. Instead of being a streamlined adventure into a fantasy world of dragons and the skimpily dressed women that love them, it is, instead, a trite collection of tiresome mini-games peppered with dull combat sequences and garnished with an utterly forgettable plot. This wouldn't be too bad a problem if said mini-games were actually enjoyable, but they're not. They're simplistic, frustrating, and repetitive. A lot of them centre on the timelessly enjoyable task of pushing crates. Pushing crates! That just screams "fun" with a capital "F", doesn't it?

Oh, and while we're talking about screaming words that begin with "f", it's worth mentioning that BoF4's camera is painful enough to make you cry. It almost seems malicious on Capcom's part, as if they wilfully designed every one of the game's environments so a big opaque wall would end up getting in your way no matter where you go. This becomes especially frustrating when one is forced



According to our compass, we're horribly lost

to participate in a timed mini-game to advance the plot. As if pushing crates wasn't bad enough, they've actually made it so you have to push crates while not being able to see what you're doing. And if you don't push all the crates to their allotted crate-space within the time limit, then you have to push crates again and again until you succeed. Can you think of a more enjoyable way to spend your time - besides banging your face into a bowl full of rusty nails?

As you can notice from the screenshots, BoF4 is hardly what we in hardcore gaming circles call "good looking". This is because Capcom have invested as little effort as possible into porting this game to PC, so it looks just like it did on the PS1 two years ago. Oh,

there are the mandatory higher resolutions and increased load speeds, but these are only worth praising if you've had the misfortune of having already experienced the game in its original format. The music is just as terrible. Bleeding ears usually brand music as terrible. This is all the more disappointing because Japanese RPGs usually have such nice tunes.

The decision to port this game over to the PC is nothing short of baffling. It's old, shabby looking and practically unknown. Surely the relatively lacklustre performance of Final Fantasy 7 and 8 on PC should've clued the people responsible for heading down a dangerous path - and they were good games. This, however, most certainly is not.

Daniel Staines

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Freelancer

Developer: Digital Anvil ■ Publisher: Microsoft ■ Distributor: Microsoft ■ Price: \$99.95 ■ Rating: MA15+ ■ Available: Now

The universe just got a whole lot bigger, but did it get better?

SYSTEM

NEED

P3-450
128MB RAM
GeForce2
1GB HDD

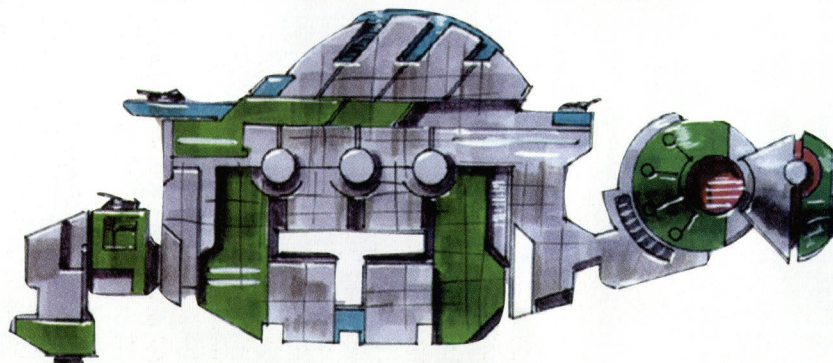
WANT

P4-2GHz+
256MB RAM
GeForce3
ADSL connection

The weight of expectation perched on the shoulders of Freelancer was so immense, it almost shifted the Earth's axis. Targeting the fanbase which dedicated the majority of their adolescence to the titles Frontier, Elite and Privateer gamers take on the role of Edison Trent, freelancer and mercenary cruising the known galaxy trading goods, salvaging wreckage and hiring himself out to the needy. Much like Han Solo, his reputation and attitude do the talking for him, plus he is scruffy lookin' to boot. So, the singleplayer challenge looks the goods, but let's launch this baby through the wormhole, that is my wall socket, and into the galaxy known as cyberspace.

We have lift-off

Freelancer may not have been able to live up to what the success a three year old, full throttle hype-machine suggests, but the singleplayer experience was far from poor and it resurrected the fantasies that humbled many a gamer's childhood. The multiplayer is an heartening extension of the singleplayer experience of roaming the galaxy and creating your own story as you go. However, the defining difference between the two aspects, and why the



multiplayer experience is superior to its little brother, is the lack of a restrictive plot. Gamers are allowed to do as they please in an almost liberal environment, so lovers of the genre rejoice.

The setup is superb and painless and a couple of clicks has you well on your way. Freelancer allows servers to host a universe that much like Neverwinter Nights, Ultima Online and Everquest, exist within. You are not restricted to a life within one galaxy, if you have found a suitable ping, you can literally settle down for the long haul. Given the gameplay's reliance on building your reputation, ship and firepower over successive missions, this concept is implemented with great success. However, it can alienate gamers who seek a quick fix and almost provides too much scope to take in all at once. This is especially so when you consider some universes can house well over 100 Edison Trents.

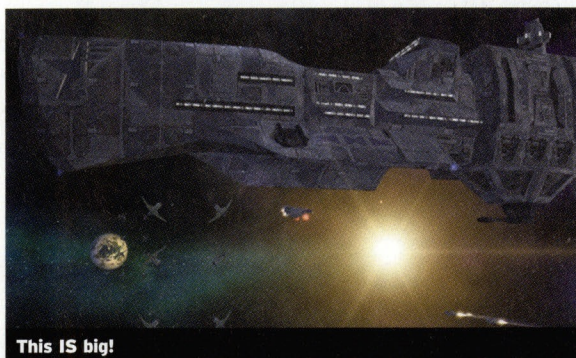
The question is, just how big can you get? There is definitely more room for growth in the multiplayer arena than its counterpart. Not only is there a greater number of parts and ships available for a hoon around the galactic block (or moon), but, unlike real life, there is no rego check likely to downgrade your prized possession. Notably, this is a universe ripe for the add-on and like other games that hinge on a rich, deep and reactive online environment, you can expect this component to be heightened in the coming months.

Anybody out there?

You begin, as with the singleplayer, in New York with a small sum of cash and one decidedly average hunk of space junk. You take a job, launch into space and begin your rise towards infamy. At first,

LOCALS IN OUT OF SPACE

With such strong anticipation, gamers all over the world have long been salivating over the opportunity of being a real Han Solo and having their way with the galaxy and their trusty Wookiee. Well, maybe not the Wookiee. Australian Gamers have been major contributors to this worldwide stockpile of saliva and are demanding local and efficient servers. Things are looking good and in the infancy stages of this game's release, Ausgamers have launched the Auslancer server and Internode has entered the fray, as have New Zealand's Iconz. But this is simply the tip of the iceberg for a massive amount of server support for this title. At present, none of the local servers have large player numbers, so hopefully, there will soon be some universes out there that can support well over 100 simultaneous gamers.



This IS big!



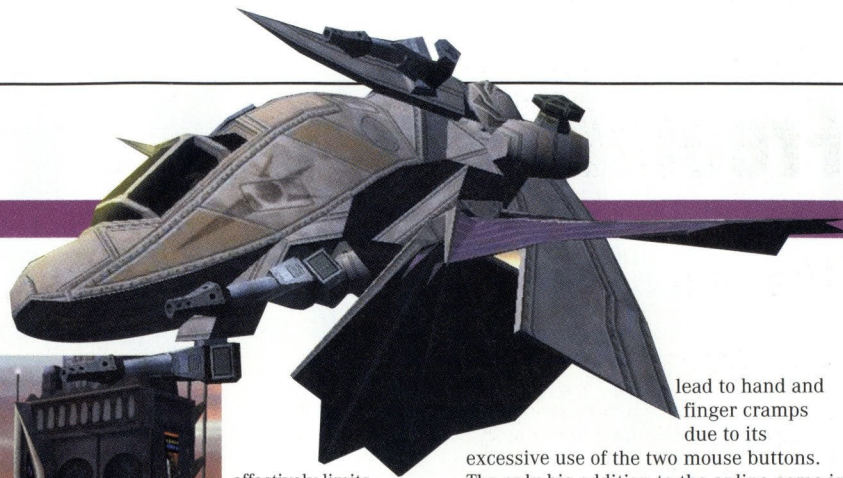
Ooo, I shouldn't have eaten that late night burrito



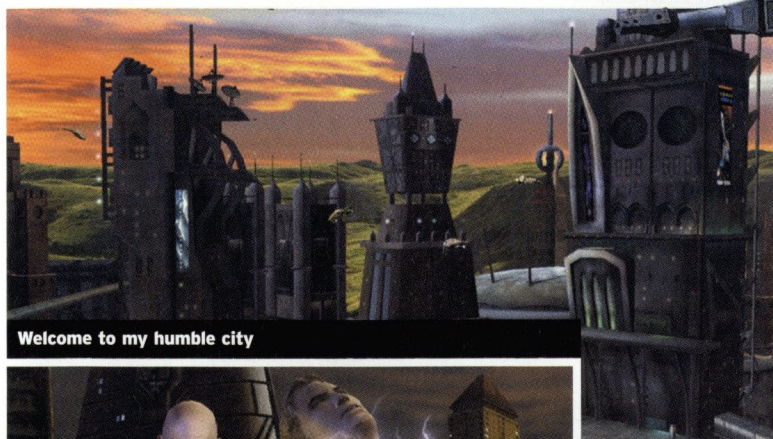
Faster! Faster!



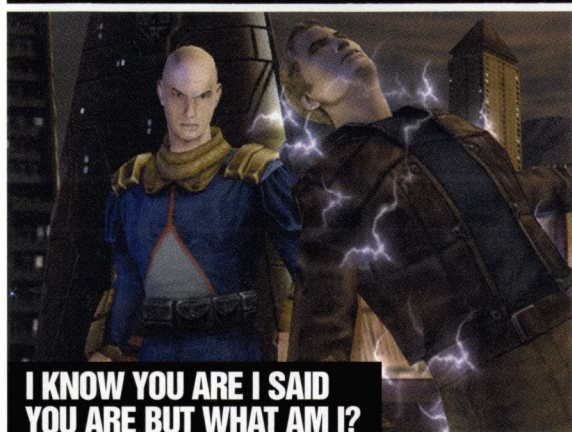
Watch out for the planet on the right!



lead to hand and finger cramps due to its



Welcome to my humble city



I KNOW YOU ARE I SAID YOU ARE BUT WHAT AM I?

Now Freelancer is a fine game and an excellent multiplayer experience, but like all good reviews, there must be some nit picking. A few 'If I made the games' comments never hurt anybody and no title should pass without some constructive criticism. Missions and counter-missions should be simultaneously received by human combatants. For example, if one player is given a mission to expel fighters from a waypoint, another human player could receive a mission to defend the same waypoint. The winner would receive the reward and be able to salvage goods from his would-be-opponents wreckage. Is this the dynamic of the future? If so, you read it here first.

there is little to suggest anything has changed from the standard game as almost all your conferring is through mission FMV's and your mission combat is against the AI. Unfortunately, in the infinity of space, bumping into another human player is rarer than a good Cuba Gooding Jr. movie, even on a maxed out server. This is a major concern as it

effectively limits the multiplayer experience to a graphically stunning chat room. However, human interaction can be achieved by organising a rendezvous, joining a group or, more satisfyingly, attacking a newbie as he or she climbs into space for the first time.

Freelancer does succeed as a living and breathing universe. There are 40 different planets and 300 random missions you can indulge in outside human to human interactions and you will be randomly attacked by pirates, as well as other humans, while achieving your goals. The excellent AI remains a potent component of the online experience and you will witness it doing its own thing regardless of the human interactions, which occur simultaneously. This is, if you will, like the Matrix. For example, witness AI controlled police ships chasing an unknown pirate around a docking bay as you head off on your own objective. This makes for a rich experience and provides and excellent backbone from which the Freelancer universe grows.

Mind if we interface?

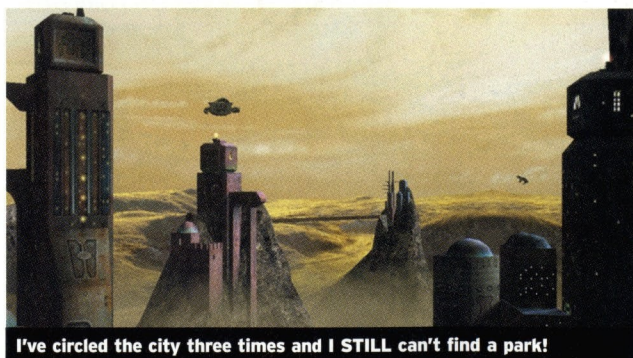
One of the most lauded aspects of Freelancer is its excellent interface and control mechanisms. Perched precariously between arcade and Sim, there is little change between the two modes and kudos must go to Digital Anvil's seamless design. In flight, combat is easily controlled, but for the under experienced, can quickly

excessive use of the two mouse buttons. The only big addition to the online game is the communication department and this is handled with relative ease and allows fluent conversation between other Trents in your universe. The only concern is missing in-game conversation, as it isn't easily noticed when the com-window is closed during a heated battle, during which there is no time to take a gander.

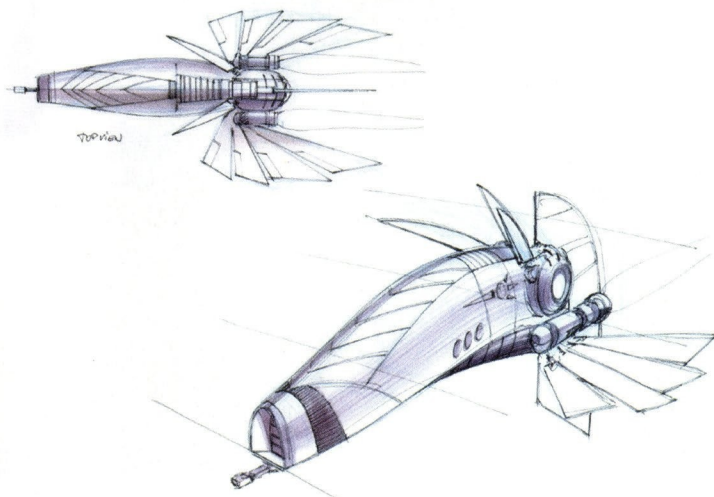
Communication maybe the essence of the multiplayer experience, but there are two other words which fuel gamer anger at a rate quicker than the Millennium Falcon on the Kessel run, they are 'lag' and 'campers'. Despite the massive number of gravitational and time distorting phenomenon present in the universe, lag is rarely a concern as most of your actions will be independent of other users. Pitching a tent in space is also a tough ask and being camped upon is a possibility, however, in the boundless movement of space, isn't as effective. In an unreal world that depends so deeply on reputation, entering planetary orbit and finding an unhappy clan hovering by the wormhole is a very real possibility.

As a multiplayer experience, Freelancer is excellent as long as you don't seek immediate and satisfying action. This is not Unreal or Counter-Strike, but is more reminiscent of the online worlds created in Everquest. There are concerns over the level of human interaction, but you can expect this cyber-universe to expand with time and popularity, providing a unique and involving multiplayer Space Sim.

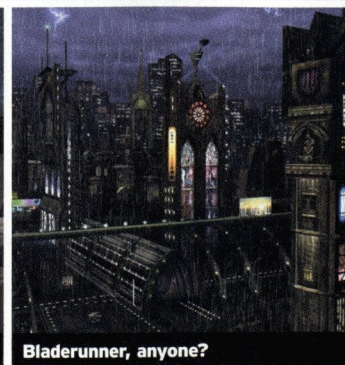
Chris Stead



I've circled the city three times and I STILL can't find a park!



Stand back!



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IN REVIEW

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D Reflecting over the changes in the computer industry since the last issue of PCPP Tech, not a great deal of ground breaking change has braced our shores, or other shores around the world for that matter - this lack of action is attributed to this time of the year, which is known to be the quietest time for the majority of companies in the IT business. Never fear though, myself and our always busy team from TweakTown have dishd up a heap of cool new products for the PC, which flirted with our mind, raised our eyebrows and made our wallets go into voluntary exile somewhere we couldn't find it.

Intel continue to carry the title of speed king in the CPU field with their high performance and high priced Pentium 4 3.06GHz with the all new 800MHz FSB style processors just hitting shelves accompanied by Canterwood based motherboards for all you Intel fans. This will assist the team at Intel fulfilling their aim of passing 4GHz sometime this year. AMD continue to battle away against the titan with their 3000+ Athlon XP processor, which has been made a little more competitive since they announced in April that a 400MHz bus will soon be implemented into future Athlon XP processors. This will give their loyal fans the extended memory bandwidth they have been screaming for since the original Athlon processor has always faced an uphill battle against the always seemingly bandwidth-ready P4.

To meet the needs of these bandwidth increasing processors, several memory manufactures, including the likes of OCZ, Mushkin, and Corsair, have continued to release faster and faster memory modules to meet the needs of increasing enthusiast crowd and take on competition from Intel, AMD and other companies. While JEDEC, the international body in charge of keeping an eye on controlling memory speeds, has only recently authorized DDR-400 (PC-3200) memory modules, the aforementioned companies have already released DDR-433 (PC-3500) and even DDR-466 (PC-3700) without JEDEC approval. The ageing body appears to have as much control over memory manufactures as the United Nations has over the Coalition of the Willing - but, of course, that's another story. If memory manufactures continue to increase their speeds without proper approval then it is up to us, as enthusiasts and end users who must show our concern in order to change this situation.

That's about it from me until the next issue; buckle up as Cameron and Shawn give us a run down on all the latest and greatest computer hardware to hit the TweakTown Labs.

Cameron Wilmot
Contributing Technical Editor
camwilmot@tweaktown.com

PCPP TECH REVIEW SYSTEM

Here at PCPP we scour the land for the latest in PC technology, then ruthlessly test it in the decentralised hardware democracy that is the PCPP Tech Bunker. Our alliance with leading online tech community www.tweaktown.com gives us access to a pool of highly specialised writers whose experience with hardware of all kinds is vast.

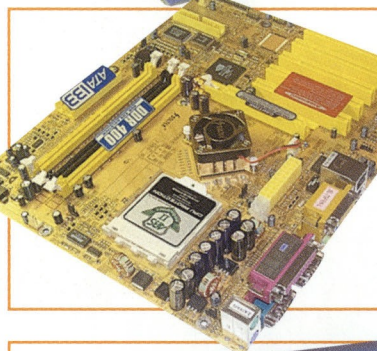
A hardware review is much more objective than a game review - there are quantifiable elements to most bits of good kit, and the benchmark, as always, reigns supreme. We take into account the performance of a product first, but price is also a factor. We provide reviews of hardware you can realistically expect to afford, as well as the occasional vanity item that's just too cool not to talk about.

All our review products are compared against at least one leading brand to give an accurate and meaningful indication of

performance and what you can expect should you actually buy the thing and put it in your precious machine.

Each product is rated out of 100, where a higher score indicates a better balance of price and performance. For items where the prices is low and performance is not relevant, such as modding accessories, a more subjective analysis of the product is undertaken, where we use our experience with such items to determine whether or not they'll help make your machine look cooler or just plain tacky.

Finally, those products that are 'must have' items receive the coveted PC PowerPlay Gold award. This award is reserved for hardware that is serious kit, indeed, and will improve your PC so it's well worth the investment.



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Gaming Tower Showdown

Jack Kulyk takes a hard look at a couple of dapper new gaming boxes

What's the ultimate upgrade? Why, simply slipping out your entire PC tower and slotting in a new one. No need to reorganise your bedroom or study, no need to deal with unnecessarily bulky monitor boxes, unfamiliar new keyboards or crazy mouses. Just unpack, plug in, and play.

To this end, we asked a couple of our favourite systems integrators to

provide a tower, just a tower, packed to the gunnels with gaming componentry and ready for hot action. Our only requirement was that the system must be provided for \$3000 or less.

Remember, there's no mouse, keyboard, speakers or monitor provided with these boxes, just a tower of pure grunt. Let's take a look and see how they do.



Metalbox Pentium 4 3.06GHz

■ Price: \$3000 ■ Distributor: Metalbox ■ URL: www.metalbox.com.au

Metalbox is clearly trying to emulate Apple in the delivery and presentation of its machines. The custom-badged Metalbox tower was delivered in a swanky silver Metalbox cardboard box and included a whole bunch of printed-up Metalbox installation documentation and other helpful hints. The machine itself has a larger than normal amount OEM customisation, with Metalbox logos appearing here and there on the Windows GUI - Windows XP Home even comes configured to the 'silver' colour scheme!

Inside the beastie we find a very beefy P4 3.06GHz processor with HyperThreading enabled, 512MB DDR333 RAM in the form of two 256MB modules, a 160GB HDD RAID array (two 60GB drives), a Sapphire Radeon 9700 Pro

videocard, 16x DVD, all running off an ASUS P4G8X deluxe.

So yes, it's a very lean configuration, indeed, with no CDRW or modem included, but it's configured for raw speed and this shows with its superior 3Dmark03 score of 4787. Compared directly with the Altech system though, it clearly wins out in a number of important areas.

The system does have slower RAM (333MHz vs 400MHz), but the P4 3.06 is considerably chunkier than Altech's AthlonXP 2700+. Also, the serial ATA hard drives in a RAID-0 array not only provide more space, but also runs faster. And Sapphire's Radeon 9700 Pro solution has shown superior performance over the Tyan unit, so you will have the gaming edge with this tower.

Finally, Metalbox's build quality is nothing short of exemplary. All wires and cords are packed away and secured for superior thermal conditions, the case has enough extra fans without sounding like a 747 and the ventilation is excellent.

This is a quality machine and well worth the investment. We highly recommend it.



PCPP Score

Well built, well equipped and well, just great. The 3GHz P4 superbly rounds out the package.

88

Altech AthlonXP 2700+

■ Price: \$2976.40 ■ Distributor: Altech ■ URL: www.altech.com.au

The only problem with a showdown, where the requisite is price rather than a specific list of components, is that a perfectly excellent machine can get unexpectedly shafted by an unusually good unit from another company. This, sadly, is the case with Altech's AthlonXP 2700+.

The tower is built around Soltek's SL-75FRV motherboard, sporting the afore-mentioned XP2700+ CPU, 512MB of 400MHz DDR RAM (once again, two 256MB modules), a 120MB HDD from Seagate, a combo DVD/CDRW drive from Samsung, and a Tyan Tachyon G9700 Pro videocard. There's also a PCI modem and 10/100 ethernet card.

So, the Altech beast is a more complete system than Metalbox's, with the inclusion of a burner and modem, but it does ultimately fail in the performance stakes, only managing a 3Dmark03 score of 4397.

The real problem is Altech's choice of components. They have

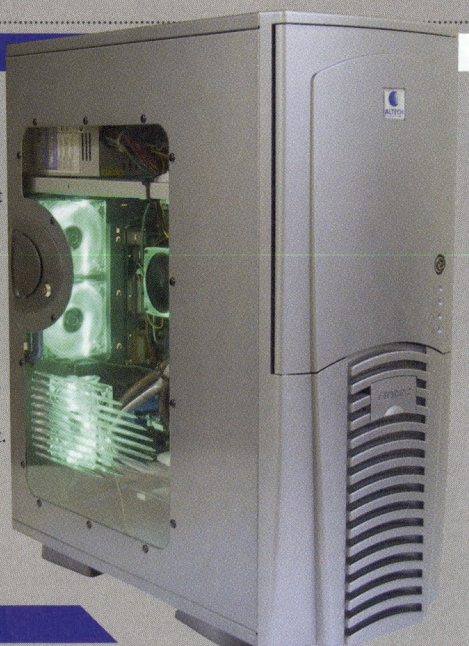
outdone Metalbox with the RAM and it could be argued that Seagate's 7200 HDD is superior to the Serial ATA drives in the Metalbox, but at the end of the day the processor and the videocard are both slower, and these are crucial components for gamers.

Okay, the margin is pretty small and for the vast majority of contemporary games you probably wouldn't see the Altech system running much slower than the Metalbox, but as the new releases come rolling inexorably in, you're going to want your \$3000 system to have as long a shelf-life as possible, and to that end Metalbox's futureproofing is just that much better. It uses newer components and newer technologies, so the upgrade path is likely to be smoother.

Altech's construction is impeccable, with a number of snazzy LED fans and UV cables keeping the thermal situation under control, but mounted in an Antec case the whole thing looks a little more generic than

Metalbox's offering. However, if modding and customisation is your thing, Altech's beast is going to be a lot easier to turt up as it already comes with a window and standard fan attachments.

On its own, Altech's machine would shine. But sadly sat next to Metalbox's sleeker, more powerful creation it is overshadowed somewhat. Perhaps a better configuration would suit more, and Altech is nothing if not flexible.



PCPP Score

A great machine in every way, but at the end of the day Metalbox has gone on better. Buy it with a different configuration though.

81

Innovision Icemat and Steelmat mousepads

■ **Price:** Icemat bundle: \$129.95, Steelmat 4S: \$69.95 ■ **Distributor:** Innovision ■ **URL:** www.steelmat.com, www.icemat.com

There's a strong contingent among the PCPP tech reviewers who say a mousepad should be nothing more than a clean desk top and it should come free with your PC.

The Ice and Steel mats are definitely not free. In fact, they are fiendishly expensive. The Steelmat we tested was the 4S model and it clocks in at an incredible \$69.95. As much as that bent our minds, the Icemat, which came bundled with a Microsoft Intellimouse Explorer 3, cost a stunning and numbing \$129.95. That's right, \$130 bucks for a mousepad (with free mouse).

Let's then take it as read that you're really, really into quality mousing surfaces and simply must own the best pad there is regardless of cost. Do these pads transcend mere mousing and make winners of even the most inept gamers? Well, a bit.

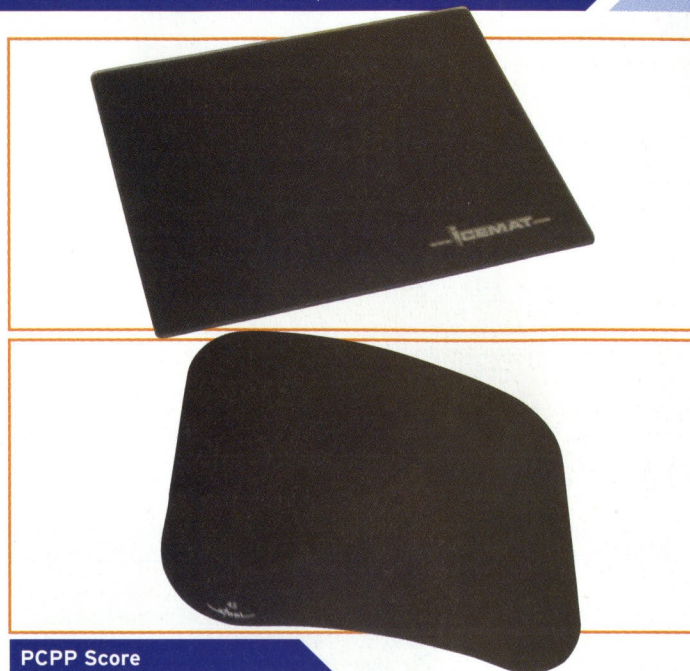
The Steelmat is of course not made of actual steel, but is in fact a sturdy plate of aluminium with a rather schmick surface treatment to make it smooth, even and scratch resistant (unless you gouge it at it with a screwdriver of course). Because aluminium can build up a static charge there's even a thoughtful anti-static strip taped to the underside of the pad

to keep it earthed. The pad is also slightly elevated on eight little rubber shoes, so there's a little bit of shock absorbance and the relatively heavy pad is easier to shift and position for comfort. It also has dangerous curves for that deadly weapon look.

The Icemat, like the Steelmat, is also not made of its namesake, but is, in fact, a chunk of glass with a surface treatment to give the user some traction. Ours was a black-backed model, which is more expensive than the transparent model also available for purchase. It's square-cut with rounded edges and offers slightly less surface area than the impeccably-sized Steelmat. Despite the higher price of the Icemat, the Steelmat is probably the better choice, although the cachet of glass is hard to resist.

Both pads improve mousing precision, but whether that improvement is worth \$70 and \$130 respectively is rather harder to say. They are both very sexy products indeed, and if being able to tell your mates you paid more than a hundred bucks for your mousepad appeals, then go ahead. We won't stop you. We might laugh but we won't stop you.

Jack Kulyk



PCPP Score

An odd couple - beautifully designed and expertly engineered - they will lift your game, but can you really justify the extraordinary price?

76

Toshiba Satellite 5200

■ **Price:** \$6499 ■ **Distributor:** Toshiba ■ **URL:** www.toshiba.com.au

The Satellite 5200 is described by Toshiba as 'the ultimate laptop'. Note especially the use of the word laptop rather than notebook. A notebook PC is a laptop that you can actually use on the road. A laptop is something you still have to sit on a desk because it's so heavy, bulky and weirdly designed. It's only portable in the sense that you can pack it up, sling it in the back seat of the car and then unpack it somewhere else.

The 5200 aims to be all things to all men. Its spec is beefy with a Pentium 4 2.2GHz CPU, 512MB RAM, a GeForce4 460 graphics chip, 60GB HDD, 15" screen and one of those optical drives that burns DVDs, CDs and reminds you to eat more fruit and try and be a better person. The machine also has a touchpad so heavily featured it can actually display an animated LCD background, double as a calculator and activate bits of the computer you never realised needed activating from the touchpad.

The 5200 marketing-speak makes a big deal of the laptop's DVD burning and mastering abilities, backed up by a grunty backbone and plenty of RAM. The screen is also a modern marvel, with a native resolution of 1600x1200 which is unusually high for a laptop LCD. The

machine can also play music without being booted up, so you can finally listen to a few tunes on the train without cracking open an enormous 15" clam just to use Winamp.

Of course, you might not be doing much more with it on the train because the 5200 is quite a lump, weighing in at 3.6Kg. However, once you do locate a desk or car bonnet you'll be able to take care of most of your movie making as the unit ships with a selection of creativity programs.

It's undeniably powerful and supports everything you could ever possibly want to plug in to a laptop, even Bluetooth. But seriously, if you want a machine this powerful and full-featured, wouldn't you spend the money on a desktop system and get four times the RAM, a 21" monitor and a beefier graphics card for probably \$1500 less?

Basically, the 5200 seems to be a bit of a flawed concept. Do users really want to sacrifice so much mobility for performance that approaches but never eclipses at the same price-point, the desktop? Of course, if you wanted a laptop for games, this one will serve the stupidly rich well. Especially the Harmon-Kardon speakers. Tasty.

Jack Kulyk



PCPP Score

Yep, it's a very powerful full-featured, damn heavy laptop that can burn DVDs and predict the future, but why spend all this money when a desktop can give so much more?

72

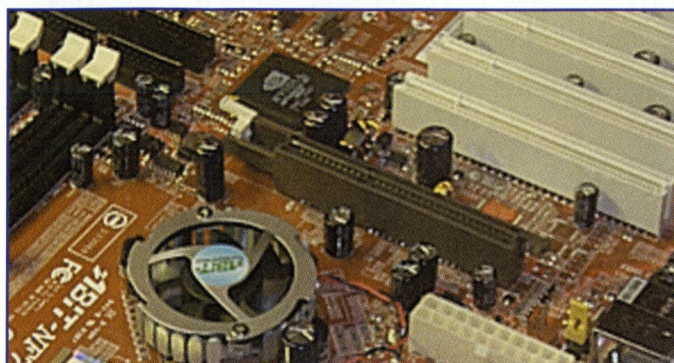
nForce 2 Shootout

Who is the best? Cameron Johnson reveals all

While making a huge splash in the 3D graphics department, nVIDIA's walk into the CPU chipset market was at first a huge stumble. On paper, the nForce Chipset was to be the ultimate in AMD Athlon chipsets. nVIDIA didn't put enough work into research and development and, as a result, the nForce was late to market and its performance sub standard with huge compatibility issues. It has been over 2 years since the nForce, during which period nVIDIA has pushed over 4

times the amount of development into the nForce 2 chipset.

The nForce 2 combines a new 400Mhz Dual Channel DDR memory controller with support for 333Mhz FSB AMD Athlons. Along with this you can get Built in Geforce 4 MX video controller on IGP boards a Dolby Digital AC3 audio and Dual networking controllers combined with the MCP-T Southbridge. Today, we have 5 nForce 2 motherboards varying in design and features. Which is the best? Let's investigate.



MSI K7N2G

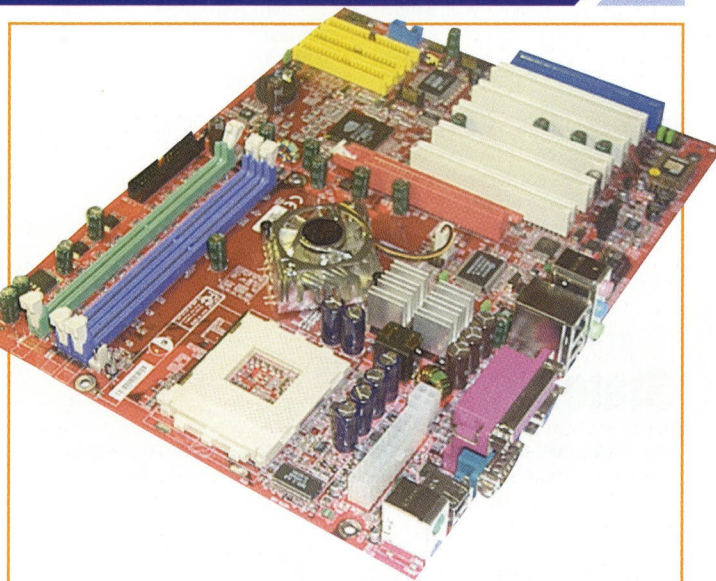
■ Price: \$260 ■ Distributor: Also Technology ■ URL: www.alsotech.com.au

The MSI K7N2G is MSI's second nForce2 based motherboard. The board is standard ATX sized PCB, so just about all ATX cases will accommodate this board without any problems. MSI's latest gig is to use RED PCBs for the case modders for a great looking inside case.

The board accommodates an expansion layout of one AGP slot supporting 4x and 8x video cards only, so older TNT2 card users are out of luck.

There are also five standard PCI slots available for the usual PCI expansion components of sound cards, modems and various other peripherals. One feature that appears on a lot of nForce

and nForce 2 based boards is the ACR or Advanced Communications Riser Slot. This slot accepts standard CNR and AMR cards for AC'97 audio cards and MC'97 Modem cards, ACR accepts new High Speed USB 2.0 expansion ports, Firewire and even xDSL for high speed DSL modems. The K7N2G is powered by the nForce 2 IGP Northbridge. This Northbridge supports DDR-400 memory in Dual Channel operations, AGP8x graphics and a built-in Geforce 4 MX 440 graphics core. The memory for the video card is shared from the System memory. Another interesting feature is the Promise Serial ATA RAID controller.



PCPP Score

A very interesting board

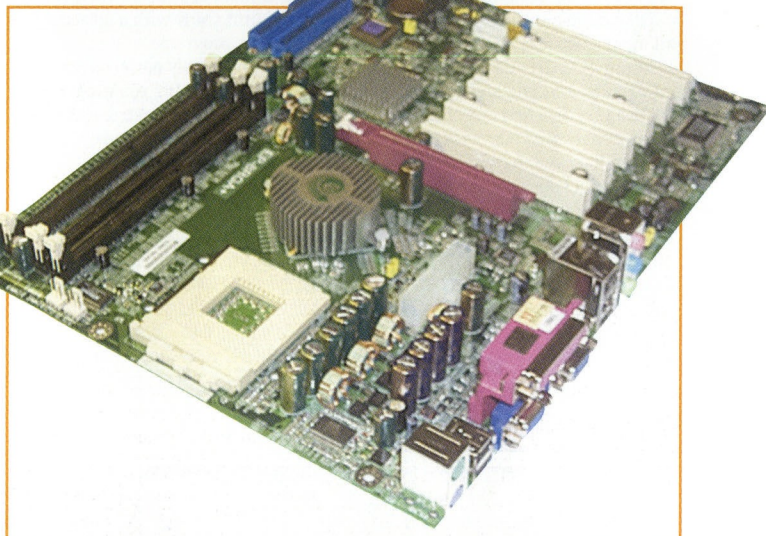
82

EPoX 8RGA+

■ Price: \$310 ■ Distributor: Westan ■ URL: www.westan.com.au

EPoX 8RGA+ is a large ATX PCB in the traditional green style, so case modders won't get the attractive look out of the 8RGA+ boards like the others. Its board layout has the standard 3 DIMM configuration for Dual Channel DDR operations and one AGP slot for AGP 4x or 8x cards only. EPoX supplied the 8RGA+ with six PCI slots, as opposed to the standard five. EPoX supports its decision because it believes it the ACR slot doesn't have a long future. Like the MSI K7N2G, the EPoX 8RGA+ is based on the nForce 2 IGP with built in Geforce 4 MX 440 video

controller, and like the K7N2G the memory for the video controller is derived from the system memory. Unlike the K7N2G, the EPoX 8RGA+ is one of the few with onboard video to supply two CRT monitor ports. Thanks to the nView feature of the Geforce 4 MX, you can have two monitors running on this board. The Southbridge of the 8RGA+ is the MCP-T, which gives Network controller, Dolby Digital 5.1 Sound and Firewire controller. EPoX supplied two Firewire ports via an expansion bracket for those with Digital Video cameras and new high speed storage solutions using the Firewire interface.



PCPP Score

Best of the onboard graphics boards, but not the end winner

78

ABIT NF7-S

■ Price: \$320 ■ Distributor: Altech Computers ■ URL: www.altech.com.au

The NF7-S is ABIT's first motherboard based on the nForce 2 chipset. This board comes in a large ATX light brown PCB. The size is identical in size to the EPoX 8RGA+. One AGP 4x/8x slot is provided along with five PCI slots. There is no ACR slot on this board and also not enough room. ABIT spaced its board out for good signal isolations along with as many peripherals as possible. The NF7-S is based on the SPP Northbridge of the nForce 2 chipset. The SPP version is identical to the

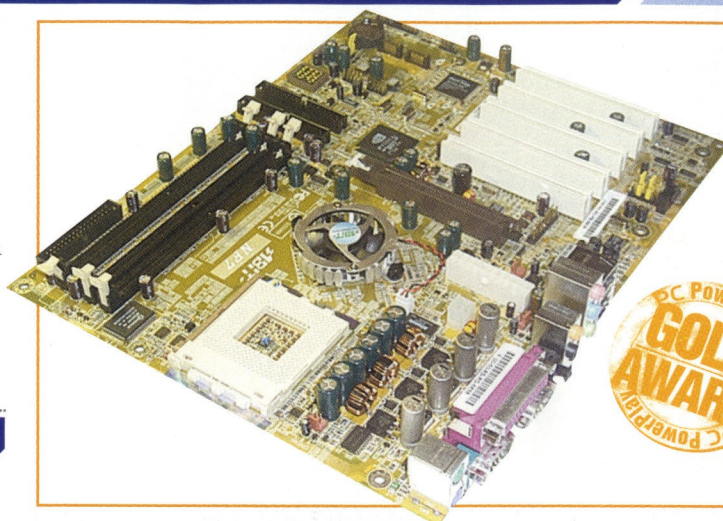
IGP version accept it has no built-in video. This is dubbed as the premium version. This chip costs less than the IGP due to the reduced production costs involved with removing the video system. The MCP-T Southbridge, which gives USB 2.0, Firewire and networking have been used on this board.

For users who want or have serial ATA hard disks, this board accommodates for your needs. Silicon Image Serial ATA controller allows for base functions for standard ATA interface or RAID 0 and 1 functions.

PCPP Score

Defiantly the best of the bunch

90



Soltek SL-75MRN-L

■ Price: \$300 ■ Distributor: Altech Computers ■ URL: www.altech.com.au

The features of the Soltek 75MRN-L is a basic motherboard, yet is designed as eye candy. Designed on a large Gold PCB, this is defiantly a board to appeal to the case modders. One AGP slot supporting 4x and 8x cards only, as well as five PCI slots are supplied for expansion cards. Like ABIT and EPoX, there is no ACR support.

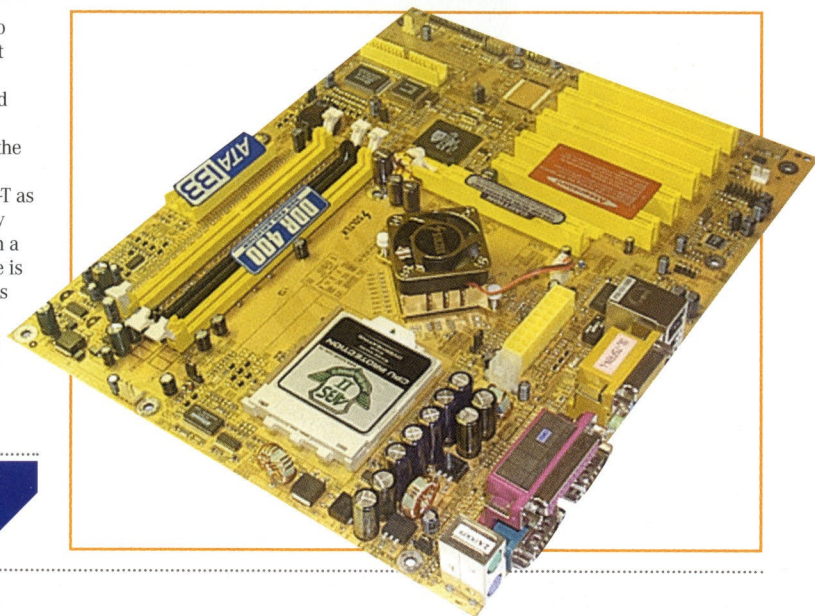
The 75MRN-L runs on the SPP version of the nForce 2. As we stated above, the IGP and SPP are almost identical except for the lack of built-in Geforce 4 MX. The SPP was brought

out for manufacturers who want to build nForce 2 boards, but without having to worry about any performance hits from the onboard graphics residing inside the Northbridge. The Southbridge on the 75MRN-L is the MCP. This Southbridge differs from the MCP-T as it does not have the APU 5.1 Dolby Digital sound system, but relies on a standard AC'97 audio codec. There is only one LAN controller built-in, as opposed to the nVIDIA and 3Com LAN controllers in the MCP-T. The removal of the Firewire controller ensures this is a budget chipset.

PCPP Score

nForce 2 on a Budget

75



ABIT NF7-M

■ Price: \$330 ■ Distributor: PC Case Gear ■ URL: www.pccasegear.com

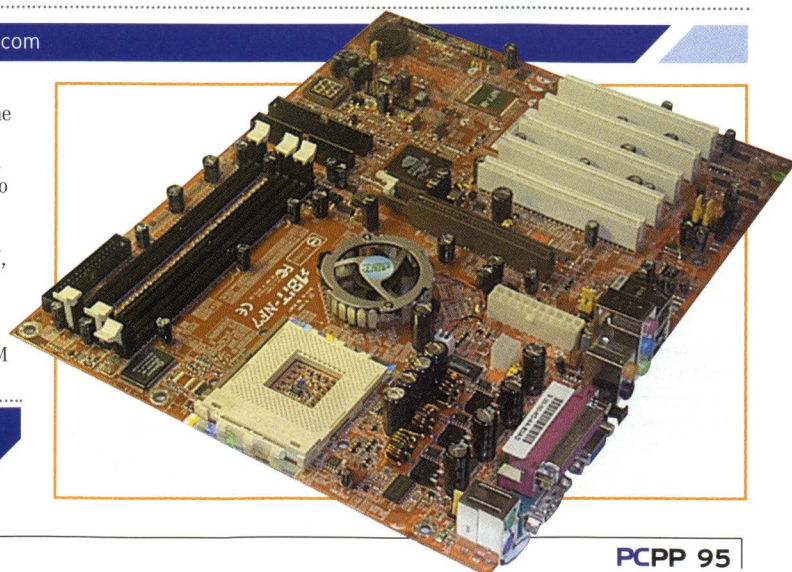
The NF7-M is the second board from ABIT based on the nForce 2. The NF7-M uses the same colour and sized PCB as the NF7-S. ABIT placed the NF7-M on the market as an all-round budget board with overclocking capabilities. The expansion layout is identical with five PCI slots and one AGP 4x 8x slots, so nothing has changed here. The IGP version of the nForce 2 chipset is used on the M

version, as you remember, the SPP was used on the S version. Due to the IGP Northbridge, the NF7-M has a built-in Geforce 4 MX graphics core. System memory is used for the video buffer with up to 64MB allocated to the graphics card. The MCP Southbridge is used, so no dual LAN, Firewire or APU sound system are used on this board. While there are solder points for a Serial ATA controller, it is not included on the M version to further reduce the costs.

PCPP Score

It's got knobs and pretty lights, what more could you want? It might not be able to take full control of your bigger fans though

81



Seagate Barracuda SATA 120GB

■ Price: \$374 ■ Distributor: Techbuy ■ URL: www.techbuy.com.au

After numerous promises from a variety of manufacturers, Serial ATA hard drives are now widely available - And it's about time too! With the tried and true Parallel ATA interface remaining the industry standard for the most part of 20 years now, it's nice to finally see some significant technological advancements on the hard drive front.

The first and arguably most significant advantage (although maybe not at this point in time) SATA will be able to provide over PATA is increased bandwidth. With the current crop of Parallel ATA drives maxing out at 133Mb/sec (hence "ATA133"), the first bunch of Serial ATA disks/controllers are packing a slightly increased transfer rate of 150Mb/sec. While, currently, the raw performance difference between the two is likely to be negligible, with SATAII currently in development we should be seeing transfer rates of up to 300Mb/sec in the not too distant future. Speedylicious!

However, we'll have to save that for another issue. Today we're taking a look at Seagate's SATA offering in the 120GB flavor, featuring a 7200RPM rotation speed, a handsome 8MB cache and a (slightly disappointing) one year warranty. Although the Seagate drive is based on the original SATA standard and thus, only supports transfer rates up to 150Mb/sec, there are still a number of reasons why existing ATA133 owners may decide to make the upgrade.

Firstly, the introduction of SATA signals the end of those thick IDE ribbon cables we all love to hate. Instead we are graced with cables much thinner than even the most well rounded IDE cables, significantly increasing airflow throughout the case, thus leaving you with a cooler system.

Another advantage of Serial ATA is its hot-swappable nature, meaning that you can add/remove drives without powering down your system - Great for external devices and server-admins alike.

Now that we've given you the theory, let's take a look at the drive's performance! For comparison purposes, as well as the SATA drive we've also managed to obtain an equivalent ATA133 PATA drive - The 120GB Barracuda ATA V. The drives were tested on a Pentium 4 2.4GHz-based system running an Abit SR7-8X motherboard and an Abit Ti4200 OTES graphics card. The SerialATA controller used was SIIG's CN2504, and in order to keep our comparison as fair as possible we've also tested the IDE drive on this controller, using the handy Abit Serillel adapter (see Tech Chaser for more details).

As we predicted, the performance difference between the two standards is virtually negligible at this point in time. That said, as previously mentioned, in time we're sure the inherent performance advantages of SATA will become much more prominent.

Overall, for those that are simply looking to purchase a new hard drive (i.e. not upgrading from Parallel ATA), we see absolutely no reason why you shouldn't take the SATA path, as it provides on-par performance, as well as easier, more convenient installation and thinner cabling. However, if you're content with your existing Parallel ATA drive, at this point in time the advantages of Serial ATA, in our opinion, do not completely justify the price of a new drive and controller. After considering the facts presented above, we'll leave you to come to your own conclusions based on your current situation.

Asher Moses



SiSoft Sandra 2003 Drive Benchmark

Seagate SATA:								25671
Seagate PATA:								24798
00000	3250	6500	9750	13000	16250	19500	22750	26000

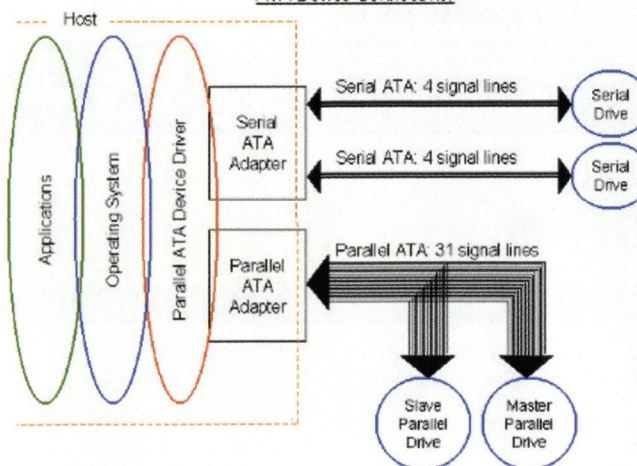
ZDNet Business Disk Winmark (Thousand Bytes/sec)

Seagate SATA:									10400
Seagate PATA:									10200
00000	1300	2600	3900	5200	6500	7800	9100	10400	

ZDNet High End Disk Winmark (Thousand Bytes/sec)

Seagate SATA:								25800
Seagate PATA:								24500
00000	3250	6500	9750	13000	16250	19500	22750	26000

ATA Device Connectivity



PCPP Score

Hot swappable installation, increased airflow, great performer but not the giant leap ahead of Parallel ATA that we had hoped for.

83

ATi vs nVIDIA Top Dog Showdown

Cameron Johnson investigates who deserves your top-end top dollar

Regardless of the final results of the currently contentious benchmarks, one thing the impending release of the GeForceFX and the Radeon 9800 will do is drive down prices of the previous top dogs - the GeForce4 Ti4800 and the Radeon 9700 Pro. Both these cards support

the new 8x AGP aperture size, finally allowing you to make the most of your shiny new specced-out motherboard. But which card should win your dollars? We pitted two of the best against each other - a Radeon 9700 Pro from Gigabyte, and a Ti4800 from Albatron. Let the games begin.

Gigabyte Maya II Radeon Pro

■ Price: \$720 ■ Distributor: Synnex Australia ■ URL: www.synnex.com.au

Gigabyte has remained a relatively neutral party in the graphics war in the past. Gigabyte first showed what it was made of with its GeForce3 videocard. This was the first and only nVIDIA card Gigabyte was willing to produce. Higher costs and low yields from nVIDIA gave Gigabyte good incentive to look elsewhere for a core graphics chipset. Gigabyte immediately turned to ATi for its 3D needs, with SiS and Matrox as the only other choices. Gigabyte let a few OEM products out the door based on ATi Radeon 7500 chips. With the 8xxx series, Gigabyte continued to push ATi's video line, and push it hard. Seeing the potential for ATi products, Gigabyte stuck on. Today this decision has paid off as the Radeon 9700 Pro remains the most powerful video unit available.

However, Gigabyte didn't let any flies sit on the shoulders of their R&D technicians and within a week of the release of the R300 core, Gigabyte had its Maya 2 card on the retail shelves. As stated this card is based on the R300 core running at 325MHz. Cooled by a gold plated heatsink and fan combination, similar to the ATi reference design, this chip is very overclockable for the hardcore user.

The memory onboard is Hynix 3.3ns BGA running at 310MHz DDR or 620MHz. This memory is located on both the front and back of the card. The chips are cooled only on the VPU side with two Ramsinks attached. Using a 256-bit interface, the Gigabyte Maya 2 has a maximum memory bandwidth of 19.6GB/s, which is one of the highest available today.

Another great feature is its

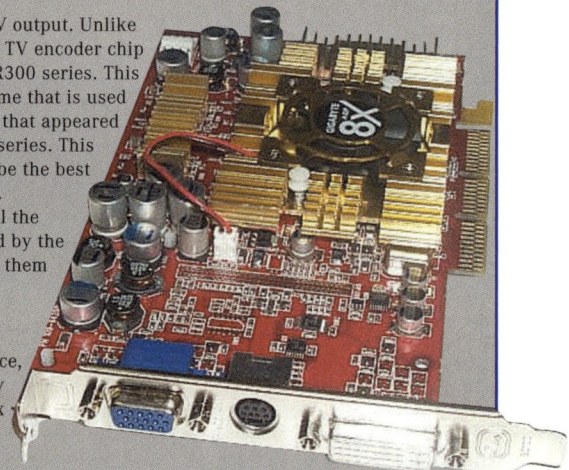
support for Native TV output. Unlike nVIDIA, ATi builds a TV encoder chip into the VPU of the R300 series. This TV encoder is the same that is used in the Rage 128 chip that appeared on the Radeon 8xxx series. This has so far proven to be the best clarity for TV output.

When you take all the extra features offered by the 9700 Pro and bundle them up with its superior performance, disregarding the somewhat higher price, this card is definitely the winner for our 8x AGP board.

PCPP Score

ATi's current flagship is simply better. And if you're into TV-output for 100cm rear projected action, then the Radeon 9700 Pro is for you

90



Albatron Medusa Ti4800V

■ Price: \$499 ■ Distributor: Rectron Australia ■ URL: www.rectron.com.au

Albatron's push into the overclockers market has been one filled with minor successes. Albatron has already proved it can deliver boards as good as the big nVIDIA producers, such as ASUS. Now we take a look at the king of Albatron's GeForce4 line, the Ti4800V.

Using an 8-layer Ti4600-sized PCB, this card, like the Medusa 4800SE, is huge so consider the space available in your case or the logistics of your motherboard before getting this card. If you have limited case space or a motherboard with memory slots near the AGP as many do have, then this card may not be the one for you.

The new, but interim, Ti4800 GPU powers the beast. The Ti4800 technology is identical in core speed with the Ti4600, and the only difference is the support for AGP 8x transfer rates as apposed to the 4x of the Ti4600.

Albatron uses a very large copper heatsink and fan combination. This heatsink is larger than the stock style nVIDIA recommends, which allows for extra overclocking.

Memory is provided by Electrontech 2.8ns BGA memory running at 325MHz DDR or 650MHz. These modules, like the Radeon modules, are located on both the front and back of the card. Unlike Gigabyte, Albatron cools the RAM on both the front and the back. This allows for a much better overclocking result for memory than Gigabyte's Radeon solution.

nVIDIA, unlike ATi, doesn't support TV out as native, as there is no internal TV encoder. Like 99.9% of the nVIDIA cards on the market though, Albatron has added the Phillips TV Encoder chip. This chip is used on most of the TV Tuner cards and all of the GeForce4 Ti videocards. The quality of this chip is nowhere

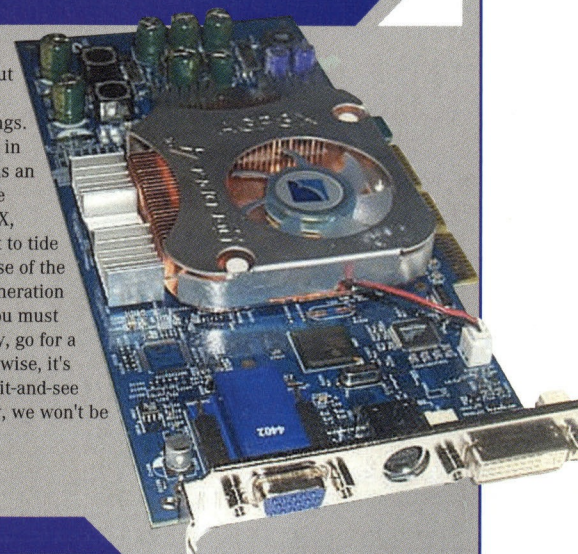
near as good as ATi's, but is still better than previous nVIDIA offerings.

nVIDIA is currently in limbo with the Ti4800 as an interim chipset until the release of the GeForceFX, which, in turn, is meant to tide you over until the release of the company's true next-generation DirectX9.1 chipset. If you must upgrade your card today, go for a Radeon 9700 Pro. Otherwise, it's simply a question of wait-and-see from nVIDIA. Hopefully, we won't be disappointed.

PCPP Score

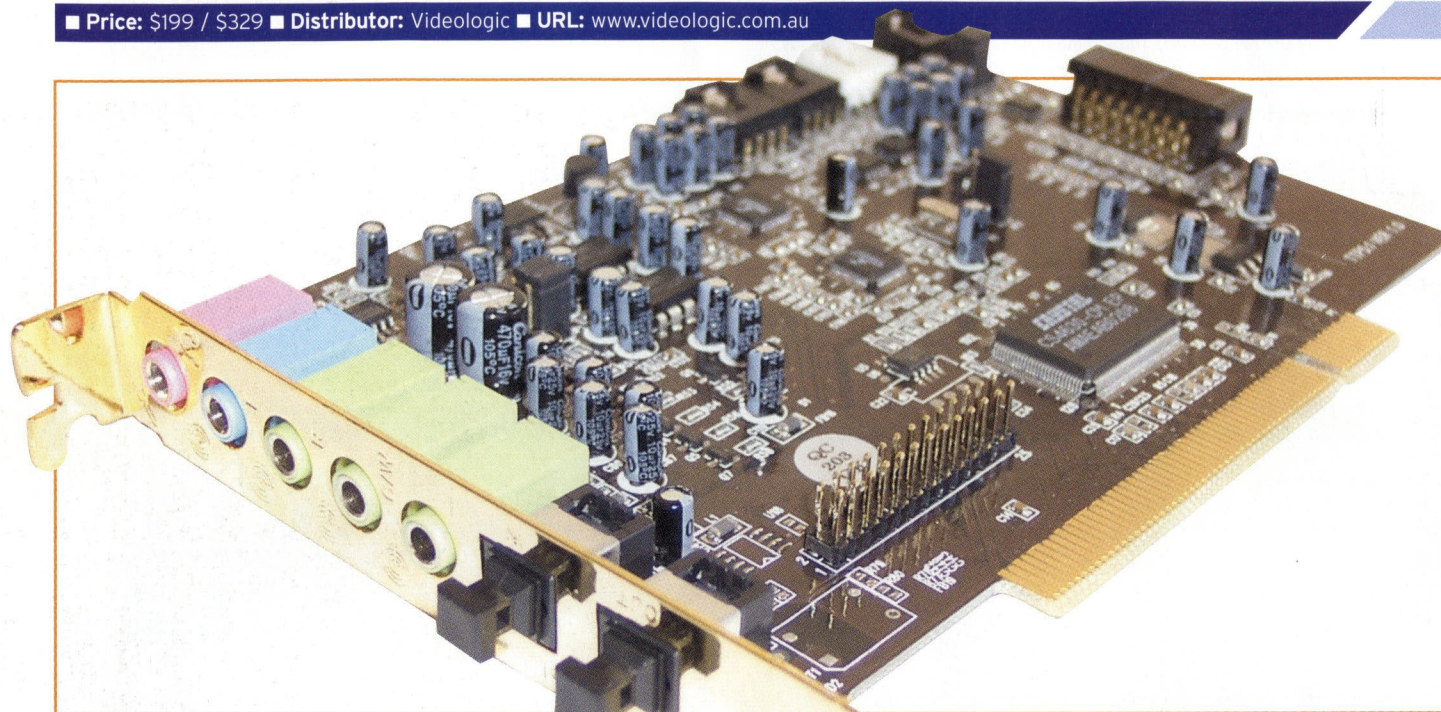
With nVIDIA's roadmap currently a little murky and ATi producing a superior GPU, the GF4 Ti4800 is not currently our chipset of choice

81



VideoLogic SonicXplosion / SonicXplosion DVD

■ Price: \$199 / \$329 ■ Distributor: Videologic ■ URL: www.videologic.com.au



All gamers know how important sound is, but some people take it more serious than others and find themselves purchasing speakers worth thousand of dollars while others are quite happy with their \$20 speakers or headphones. There are two main options when it comes to sound these days. You can use your onboard sound, which lacks in just about every field as far as quality is concerned, except in the case of the nForce 2 chipset. But, if you're not lucky enough to have such a combo, you'll need a PCI soundcard.

Creative's Soundblaster range has a virtual monopoly when it comes to cards with the vast majority of users picking up a dependable, feature-rich Creative product from their locale systems integrator. But what if for some bizarre reason you don't want an SB Audigy or other Creative card?

VideoLogic is a logical alternative choice from a company that has a good track record with soundcards, and was the first to create a PCI soundcard many years ago. Now, with the first high performance 6-channel card they hope to become another big player in the soundcard market. Indeed, the company claims its SonicXplosion series is the world's first card with DTS decoding.

There are two versions of the card. The SonicXplosion and the

SonicXplosion DVD. The vanilla version contains such features as six channel out, optical in and out, speaker test facility, an excellent software bundle and support for all the most popular audio standards, including DirectSound, DirectSound 3D, EAX, Sensaura, A3D and DLS. Priced at a very respectable \$199 you get good value for its specs.

The top end model, known as the SonicXplosion DVD, comes with all the above features and some more. The big thing behind the DVD version is the 'out of the box' functionality for the major surround sound formats, for example Dolby Digital, Dolby ProLogic 2, DTS and Dolby Headphone. Also included are Intervideo WinDVD 4, Jet Audio and Storm to bring your audio experience to life.

One of the most common soundcards among gamers would have to be the SoundBlaster Live Value, offering EAX and support for 4.1. Many users find the card perfect for their needs. On the other side, there are people who enjoy the crispness that other soundcards can offer and find spending a few hundred dollars on a soundcard and speakers no big deal. Upgrading from a SoundBlaster Live Value you instantly feel the true potential

from your speakers with deeper bass and clearer treble.

One of the handiest programs included in the bundled software is Jet-Audio, which is included only with the DVD version of the card. Jet-Audio gives you control over most audio-visual files in one program; it has the ability to read mp3, avi, mpeg, mpg, rm and more, eliminating the need for such programs as WinAmp, Media Player, and Real Player, resulting in a central program to do everything for you. Some people prefer to have a separate program for all their different files and these are included in the soundcard with programs like WinAmp 3 and WinDVD.

If you are a little more serious

about your sound and use it as a tool for creating your own music you will find the long list of mixing and composing programs handy including Storm Music Studio, ACID Xpress, FruityLoops and a load of others. If you're interested in having fun with your music you will find programs like Dart Karaoke and vanBasco's Karaoke Player a bit of fun.

The sound quality provided by the SonicXplosion is not the best on the market, but, fortunately, it is right up there. The SonicXplosion is priced very reasonably if you are looking at a soundcard that is above average but don't want to spend over \$300. If you are a bit more serious, you may go for the DVD version of the card, which really gives you the ability to have excellent sound when watching DVDs without the cost of having to purchase extra equipment to have such features as DTS and ProLogic sound, which come straight out of the box.

Shawn Baker

Under the Bonnet

Like most of VideoLogic's high end soundcards, the Sonic Xplosion is based on a TerraTec board. The Digital Signal Processor is a CS4630 Soundfusion from Crystal, a fairly able chip that has a good history. It means the card is capable of all audio quality except 24bit/192KHz, so for the hard, hard core an Audigy 2 would still be a superior choice.

Where the card does win over the Creative product is in its ability to support all 3D sound formats except for EAX 3.0, so no matter which game you throw at it, 3D

sound is likely to still work. The other good thing about the Crystal DSP is that it can handle MP3 decoding in hardware - the DSP is from the family used in Hercules's venerable and admirable Gametheater XP. Finally, it's important to realise that this card supports all surround formats except the very newest - Dolby Surround EX 7.1. Reason to avoid? Probably not, but it's worth considering if you really are toying with not buying a Creative card. Shock! Horror!

PCPP Score

An excellent card for users looking for quality without wanting to drop a massive amount of cash on a top-end card from Creative. However, this is not for true audiophiles.

85

PC3500 DDR SDRAM Showdown

Cameron Johnson knows how to steer you right when it comes to DDR RAM

Last month we took a look at Kingston's new HyperX RAM, a shiny blue module billed as the ultimate in overclockability and performance. And true, its performance was excellent, but we

were keen to see how it fared against its rather more modestly coloured contemporaries. We stacked three of the best known brands against each other, and the results were quite surprising.

Corsair XMS3500

■ Price: \$315 ■ Distributor: Corsair ■ URL: www.corsairusa.com

Corsair has become a household name for overclockers. The XMS or eXtreme Memory Standard modules have developed a reputation for their extreme overclocking capabilities. We first saw the XMS in Corsair's SDRAM line with PC150 and PC166 modules. In order to secure its DDR-based future, Corsair didn't rush into the DDR industry, instead it invested in sensible DDR R&D. This allowed Corsair to build up faster modules with greater support. Corsair's first DDR XMS was the XMS2700.

The XMS3500 meanwhile, is rated for 433MHz operations at an extremely low latency of CL2, 6-2-2 1T. This is, by far, the lowest latency of all of the DDR-433 modules. The chips used are Winbond 5ns memory modules, which have been also been used by Kingmax on their SuperRAM and TwinMOS on their PC3200 and PC3500 modules. This is proof positive of Corsair's dependability as it uses a chip that has already demonstrated its capabilities. Corsair, like most of the hardcore memory overclockers, supplies its



modules with a Thin Alloy Heatspreader. This heatspreader is identical in design to the Thermaltake DRAM cooling kit's memory heat spreader. Two alloy strips are held onto the module with metal clips and Thermal Transfer Tape. This is excellent because it allows the memory

to transfer its heat off the modules and onto the spreader.

Unfortunately, at the end of the day, Corsair's module just doesn't keep up with Kingmax or OCZ. The margin is minimal, true, but when all these products come in at the same price, a few benchmarks can be vital, and in the case of Corsair, they sound the death knell.

PCPP Score

Faultless construction, good technology, but sadly loses out in the benchmarks. However, if you can get it cheap, it's worth it

79

OCZ PC3500 EL

■ Price: \$312 ■ Distributor: Ramstore Canada ■ URL: www.ocztechnology.com

OCZ has been known for its push on superior overclocking results, and over the past few releases, has justified its namesake. OCZ started with SDRAM modules that could push 200MHz, which is no mean feat, as this was well above anything Corsair or any other company could produce. The OCZ PC3500 EL DDR SDRAM is rated at 433MHz at a CAS rating of CL2 with timings of 6-2-2 2T. This is almost identical to the Corsair XMS3500, but with a higher Command Rate timing. This will slightly increase

the latency between the CPU and the memory adding a few extra seconds to command queues.

OCZ does not rely on third party memory modules, instead using its own OCZ 5ns memory modules on the EL DDR-433 PCB. These modules are manufactured and hand picked by OCZ for maximum memory performance as well as overclocking results.

As OCZ is the only company that uses these modules, it may deter the end user - RAM buffs like nothing more than consistency. But OCZ

does a rigorous testing process on these chips.

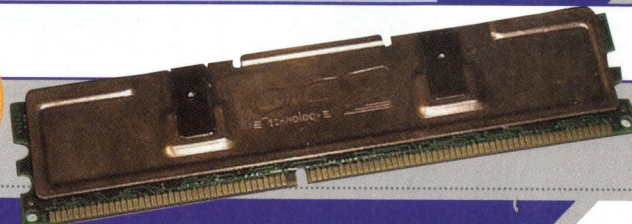
Like Corsair, OCZ uses a Heatspreader on the RAM, but the defining feature is OCZ uses a thicker copper spreader, instead. This is better for cooling as Copper can absorb more heat than the Alloy spreaders on the Corsair RAM.

When we benchmarked Kingmax's HyperX, which touts itself as the overclocking king, against the older OCZ module, the results were surprising. The OCZ module won out in the benchmarks, albeit by a very slim margin, but this still makes OCZ the choice RAM for the PC purist.

PCPP Score

A narrow victor in performance and overclockability. Edges out the specially designed HyperX making OCZ the RAM of choice

93



Kingston HyperX PC3500

■ Price: \$310 ■ Distributor: Kingston ■ URL: www.kingston.com.au

Kingston is, by far, one of the biggest global memory manufacturers, but in the overclocking world, its name is little-known. Kingston has in the past stuck to traditional OEM products, as well as keeping with what the market wants and needs. Kingston saw good success with ValueRAM, which was one of the cheapest and most widely accepted low cost DDR SDRAM solutions. Kingston was also adopted by Intel for its Rambus RDRAM to accompany its first P4 test systems for reviewers. Last

month, we took our first look at the Kingston's first foray into overclocking with its HyperX.

As a quick refresher, HyperX is the first attempt on Kingston's part to produce a sexy and desirable retail product aimed directly at a hardcore overclocking market. It uses swanky blue metallic heatspreaders on both the front and the back of the module that is made of alloy like Corsair, but using OCZ's rather more sturdy retention clips to keep it in place. Thermal tape is also used to ensure

proper heat transfer and thus better stability when overclocked.

The chips are Kingston's own brand and runs at 5ns. This allows Kingston to run the timings at CL2 6-3-3 2T, which is the highest of the three modules we have so far seen. For Kingston's first attempt at the

overclocking scene, HyperX is a great product, but because of OCZ's narrow victory, HyperX can't be crowned the king of the overclocking scene. However, it sure is the prettiest module in town, and that's got to count for something in these days of case mods and perspex windows!

PCPP Score

Clever design and excellent performance is only slightly edged out by competition. Get it if you have to have metallic blue!

90



LG External DVD/CD-RW Combo Drive

■ Price: \$457 ■ Distributor: LG ■ URL: www.lge.com.au

Last week, if you had asked me who or what LG was, I would have said some sort of tropical disease. If you asked me today, I would say one of the best makers, if not the ultimate, in electronic equipment. I have used many LG products such as DVD players, refrigerators, TVs as well as home cinema equipment, but I had only had one experience with their computer products, and this was a disaster for me. However, I am never one to judge a book by its cover and the new DCD/CD-RW combo drive deserved a fair chance, so I approached it with an open mind.

This drive is one of the smallest CD-RW units we have ever seen, especially for an external unit, but does it have what it takes to compete with the big Internal CD-RW drives? Well, before we answer this let's first have some info on the drive.

The unit is designed for people with notebook PCs who don't have a DVD drive or who want to add a CD-RW drive. Designed in an extremely slim case, it looks more like a Discman than a drive. The unit specs include a 16x DVD-ROM, 24x CD-R, 10x CD-RW and 32x CD-ROM in a USB 2.0 interface enclosure.

That's right, this unit uses the

USB 2.0 Interface. This is great because USB 2.0 controllers offer increased speeds of up to 480Mbps. This is 80Mbps faster than Firewire connections, as well as USB ports that are standard on Desktop and laptop PCs. If your PC or Notebook doesn't have USB 2.0 ports, don't worry, you can still use the unit on a USB 1.1 port, however, transfer speeds and write speeds will be greatly reduced.

LG packages the unit with a multiplug power adaptor. This adaptor accepts input voltage ranges from 110 to 240 Volts AC. With interchangeable wall plugs this allows you to transport this device over the world without having to worry about the power to run the drive.

If you don't have recording software already, LG gives you Nero Burning ROM, one of my personal favourite recording programs. As for the DVD side, the lean and functional Cyberlink PowerDVD is included to playback DVD movies on the drive.

So, here's a product that achieves its brief admirably - it's portable, it's fast, it can burn and it can play back DVD. Plus, it even looks funky. What more could you want?

Cameron Johnson



PCPP Score

Definitely portable, this sleek and slim drive performs as well as a decent internal IDE solution for your PC and, by gum, it's a hell of a lot prettier. Plus, DVD playback rocks.

91

ASUS P4G8X Deluxe Gold

■ Price: \$490 ■ Distributor: Altech ■ URL: www.altech.com.au

ASUS is considered one of the more expensive, but also one of the most stable motherboard manufacturers on the market. The board we are looking at is the ASUS P4G8X Deluxe Gold, with a load of features ranging from AGP 8X to Serial ATA and more.

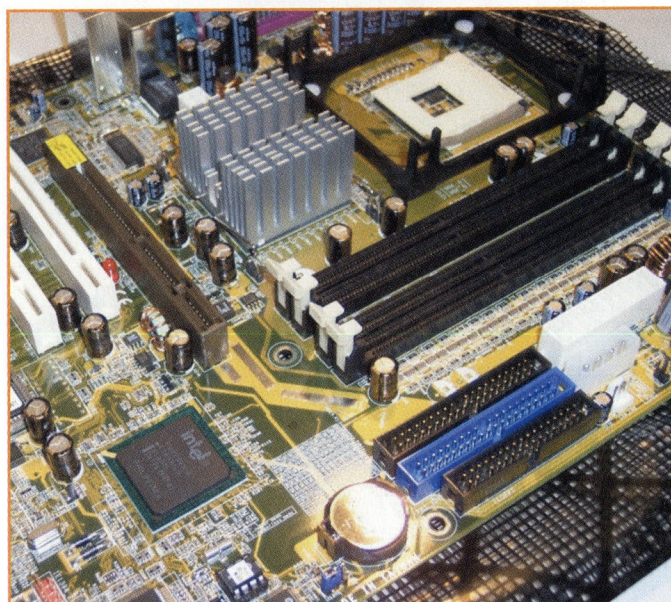
The P4G8X uses the latest Intel Chipset the E7205, otherwise known as the Granite Bay. The chipset is aimed at the true enthusiast bringing features like AGP 8X, Serial ATA, Hyper Threading, Gigabit LAN and Dual Channel DDR. These features with the latest Intel chipset is one of the fastest Intel Rigs up and running. Dual Channel DDR is designed to give the high memory bandwidth of RDRAM without the high latency RDRAM brings with it - overall, you are eliminating the memory bottleneck in your system. While the board currently only supports PC2100 Dual Channel, hopefully, in the near future it will officially support PC2700 or 333MHz memory.

The Granite Bay chipset was originally aimed at light server operations, so it included such features as Gigabit Ethernet to help keep up with the load. But the

board's speed and overclocking ability quickly captured the interest of enthusiasts and they haven't looked back since. Other features like Firewire and Serial ATA make the board excellent for people who demand the most out of their computer without worrying about purchasing extra PCI cards.

Performance of the board is definitely up there with the best of them, unfortunately, as it is a more expensive product it will initially only be picked up by the enthusiast market and people wanting to create a server for light duties and need that extra bandwidth PE chipset can't provide. Teamed up with a Radeon 9500 Pro, the board is very powerful and you should find yourself not running into any trouble with the latest games on the market. If you have the money and you want the fastest Intel Pentium 4 system out there it would defiantly be worth looking at the ASUS Granite Bay board. If you want to save a few dollars you can always go to the Deluxe version or just the vanilla P4G8X, which happens to have less features than the Deluxe Gold version.

Shawn Baker



PCPP Score

An excellent board with a load of features, but all new products come with a higher price tag, so some may not be able to afford it.

89

Microsoft Bluetooth Optical Desktop

■ Price: \$399 ■ Distributor: Microsoft ■ URL: www.microsoft.com

Wireless keyboards have been a hard product to push into the gaming community, mainly due to sloppy response times, which in turn adversely affects that all-important frag rate. Microsoft has been creating high quality keyboards and mice for a long time now, and the computing supergiant has just recently jumped into the next generation of wireless products by creating one of the first Bluetooth keyboards.

The most distinct feature of the keyboard (apart from Bluetooth support) is the blue and silver colour scheme. The setup process is a bit longer than your normal keyboard or mouse due to the installation of all the drivers needed for Bluetooth. It's definitely worth taking note if you are a user of Windows XP that Service Pack 1 will need to be installed to support the device. Fortunately, this is included on the CD Microsoft provides with the combo.

While installing the drivers you will still need to have your original keyboard and mouse installed as you won't be able to navigate with the new one until the drivers have been totally installed - don't worry

as this is all explained clearly in the manual provided. Everything is provided in the package to get the combination up and running as quickly as possible, including four heavy duty Energizer batteries.

What about gaming performance? Is this combo worth the rather intense \$400 price tag? We loaded up Quake 3, DM6 and a few nightmare bots to see if it could respond as quickly to rocket jumps as the Intellimouse Explorer 3 we currently use. No problems with the keyboard and its response time is perfect due to the high quality receiver. The mouse, on the other hand, doesn't quite have a scan rate as high as the Explorer 3.

Unlike earlier wireless products, you will notice a huge increase in performance, unfortunately the kit is held back by a high price tag and is aimed at people who use their keyboard more often than the usual user and is fussy about wires.

Another point worth taking note of, is you are unable to use the keyboard on immediate boot, so you are unable to access the BIOS from startup until you get into Windows.

Shawn Baker



PCPP Score

The best wireless combo on the market, though some people will not be able to justify the cost of this keyboard. You're likely to see it on your manager's desk before yours.

89

Imation RipGo MiniCD MP3 Player

■ Price: \$399 ■ Distributor: Imation ■ URL: www.imation.com

Whether you are a music enthusiast or a mobile business professional, this device is a worthy addition to your digital lifestyle. It's great for both recording compressed music and for high-performance playback of CD, Microsoft Windows Media Audio, MP3, Digital Audio, PowerPoint files, digital video and audio clips, and more. Use it in the office, on the plane, or train, or on your couch at home.

First, there were MP3 CD players, then came mini MP3 CD players that used 8cm CD-Rs instead of the standard-sized 12cm CD-Rs. And now, thanks to Imation, we have a mini MP3 CD player that doubles as a burner. Imation has inserted a 44Hz 16bit MP3/WMA player to a Mini CD Reader. This allows for over 180MB worth of MP3 or WMA files to be packed into an 8cm CD. This proves to be a much cheaper option than 180MB Flash memory cards by a factor of 100. These Mini CD-Rs can also be recorded by a standard CD-R or RW drive, so you can use your PC to make your discs and the RipGo to play

them - ever wondered why there's an inside groove in your CD tray? Have a look... now you know, it's for 8cm CDs. Or you can plug the RipGo into your PC and burn with it.

The unit connects to a standard USB port to act as a CD-R unit. Windows 98 requires a simple driver for detection, whereas Windows Me, 2000 and XP detect the unit as a standard USB CD-R drive. The unit writes to 4x, which is the maximum for USB 1.1 transfer rate, so it's hardly speedy, but it works damn well in a pinch.

In the package you get an Installation CD with drivers for Windows 98, as well as PDF documents explaining the full use of the RipGo. To record onto the CD-R, Nero Burning ROM is also included along with 2 Mini CDs.

This is a great little product that definitely falls in to the 'fun' category. Sure, maybe saving up for a hard-drive based MP3 player is the sensible thing to do, but with the RipGo you get to play with cool 8cm CDs! What could be better than that? (40GB capacity and no hinged door to snap off? - Ed)

Cameron Johnson



PCPP Score

A bit of fun for the gadget-happy who haven't got \$1000 to spend on a hard-drive based MP3 player. Clever implementation of technology makes this a versatile little burner, indeed.

86

Flexiglow Bubble Cold Cathode

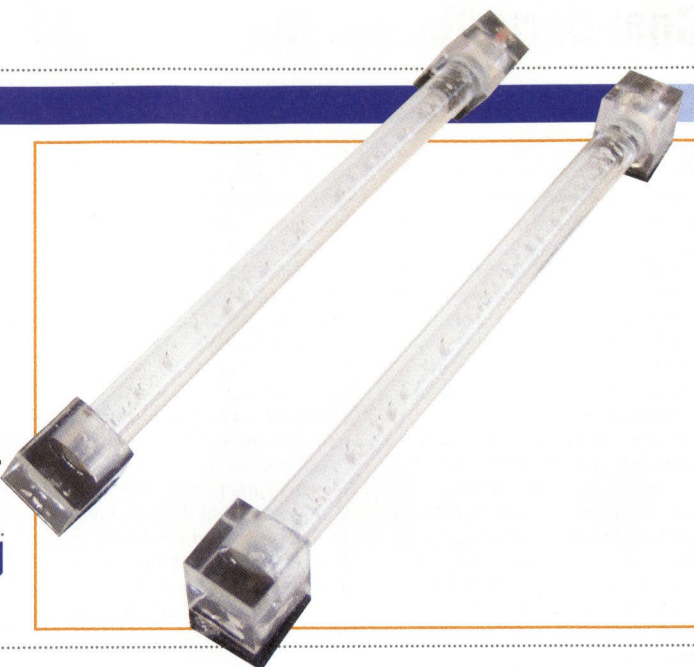
■ Price: \$100 ■ Distributor: Flexiglow ■ URL: www.flexiglow.com

The bubble cold cathode light offers flashier cosmetic effects over conventional cold cathode tubes. Instead of emitting a high amount of light, it gives you something to look at, which of course is a bubble effect similar to that mainstay of the funky apartment, the lava lamp. If you are in the market for something to light up your case, you will probably not be satisfied with this product, on the other hand, if

you are after something to grab people's attention this may be perfect for you. The kit includes two shorter cold cathodes to be placed within your case in an available range of colours.

In the end, you have to decide if you want to get rid of the all-too familiar 'glow' effect and giving people the option for something a little different. Are you ready to have a lava lamp inside your PC? That's a question only you can answer.

Shawn Baker



PCPP Score

The border between kitsch and cool is very narrow, but this funky little light straddles the fence admirably.

80

PC Case Gear UV Reactive 60mm - 80mm Adapter

■ Price: \$30 ■ Distributor: PCCaseGear ■ URL: www.pccasegear.com.au

Upgrading to an 80mm fan gives you the ability to push the same amount of air at a lower RPM, resulting in a quieter fan. This is where a 60mm to 80mm fan adaptor comes in.

We're shameless aesthetes, down here in the PCPP Tech Bunker, and we reckon if you're going to purchase a fan adaptor you may as well buy one that will also jazz up your case. If you have chosen to go for a UV theme and want to upgrade that old 60mm fan this adaptor may be just what you're after. Being a fairly basic product

there isn't a lot to say about it: the package consists of a clear plastic fan adaptor and enough screws to set up your new fan.

When under a UV light, you will instantly notice the aqua colour change, which gives a nice little effect. Teamed up with a UV Reactive 80mm fan you will have a perfect combination of lighting. This product can only be used with 60mm fans, if you wanted to upgrade from a 72mm or 80mm fan you would have to purchase a larger adaptor.

Shawn Baker



PCPP Score

A very basic product with limited market value, but it does what it's suppose to do and adds a little something else, too.

70

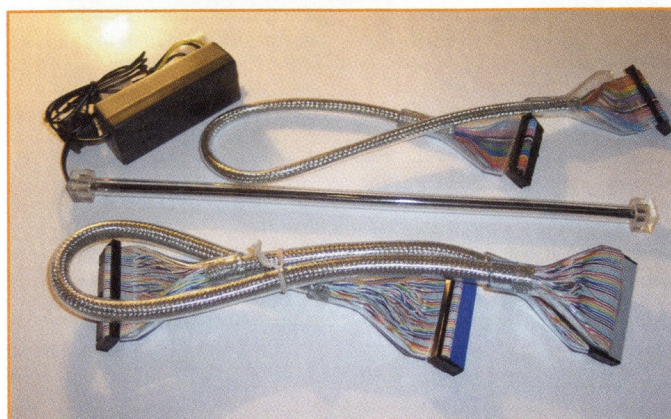
Modware UV Black Light Kit

■ Price: \$42 ■ Distributor: Webber 4 Technologies ■ URL: www.webber4.com

Modware has put together an excellent kit with the main item being a UV Cold Cathode, similar to the Sunbeam unit (above), that emits a black light instead of colour. Included in the kit is a UV Reactive ATA 133 IDE cable and a FDD cable that also reacts to the black light. The kit is perfect for users who have a single hard drive and CDROM along with a floppy disk drive and want to

add some spooky 80s roller-disco flavour to their case. If you are someone just getting into the modding scene, the kit is defiantly a good purchase as its simple to set up and has all the equipment you need to give your old case a bit of style. You shouldn't have any trouble getting a hold of these kits in Australia.

Shawn Baker



PCPP Score

It's got knobs and pretty lights, what more could you want? It might not be able to take full control of your bigger fans though

81

CoolerMaster Cool Drive 3

■ Price: \$50 ■ Distributor: Australia IT ■ URL: www.australiait.com.au

As hard drives get faster these days, they also get warmer and it isn't uncommon to have a fan or two blowing cool air across your hard drives to keep them at a safe temperature to prevent any harm. The hard drive is one of the most important parts for a computer user mainly because it stores all its user's information, but more importantly, weeks worth of save game files. So, it makes sense to give the hard drive a separated little enclosure, which is exactly where the Cool Drive 3 comes in straight into our hot little hands - the location of the Cool Drive 1 and 2 is beyond me. The Cool Drive 3 is one of the first coolers to make the whole enclosure to work as a giant heatsink; the front of the drive has the usual 20mm fan that is found in most hard drive coolers, but, unfortunately, the fan is so small it barely pushes any air. But the temperature is maintained with a number of features,

namely the aluminium case and the giant pad on the under side of the which works the same way as a thermal pad some people use to cool their processors.

Some drives are known for getting hotter than others and this device should come in handy for people who want it for peace of mind. Although the drive may not get hot enough to cause any form of data loss you may feel more confident if your drive was that few degrees cooler on those hotter days. What's appealing is the Cool Drive 3 is one of the first caddies to utilise the concept of the thermal pad to keep the temperature down, as most companies use a little fan. Whilst maintaining the functionality of the drive, they have also managed to make it look great with 2 blue LEDs on each side of the caddy and a nice silver finish to suit your aluminium case.

Shawn Baker



PCPP Score

Excellent enclosure that is one of the first to actually cool the hard drive.

95

Vantec USA EZ Swap MRK-102FD

■ Price: \$79 ■ Distributor: PC CaseGear ■ URL: www.pccasegear.com.au

Vantec have been producing a great line of products lately and when I had the opportunity to open up their latest device, I was glad to see what looked like another attractive product from Vantec. Last month, we had the opportunity to have a look at the Vantec RheoBus, which came out on top in a RheoBus Roundup on TweakTown a few months back. It not only looked great, but it was also functional and we thought everyone should be using it. This month, we are looking at the EZ Swap drive from Vantec, a portable and secure mobile rack. Once opening up the package the first thing you notice is a nice little LCD on the left, which had us thinking it wasn't your normal removable hard drive rack. We were looking forward to finding out what it did and quickly installed a hard drive into it to see how it marked up. Installation is not a problem and there are instructions if you need them, but it's all quite self-explanatory. The model we have is the MRK-102FD and there are other models available, the cheapest being the a

cut down version of MRK-102FD without the LCD and is simply a removable hard drive rack.

Some of the features in the caddy are ATA 133 Ready, Aluminium Case, Overhead Alarm and Display, Rear cooling fan and key lock access. The LCD shows drive temperature, if it's a slave or master and how long the drive has been running for. If silver isn't your colour you will be pleased to know there is a Black and Beige version available so the caddy shouldn't look out of place in your case. The inclusion of the key lock is always a handy feature and, unless locked, the drive won't be detected, this is to prevent people from pulling out the hard drive while it is in operation, which of course can cause the drive to lose information or altogether stop working. Depending on what you want to do with your hard drive, you will find out if the Cool Drive 3 or the MRK-102FD is what you're after.

Shawn Baker



PCPP Score

Excellent removable caddy that is unfortunately slightly more expensive than the average.

86

THE BEAST

THE MOST POWERFUL GAMING PC GOOD MONEY CAN BUY

We've handed the Beast over to those clever fellows at TweakTown and they've made some tasty changes to the Beast we know and love. Prepare for a new age of extreme performance!

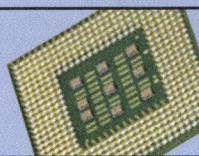


CPU, MEMORY AND MOTHERBOARD

Intel Pentium 4 3.06Ghz (With Hyper Threading)

Currently the fastest processor on the market in terms of raw clock speed, you've got yourself a seriously fast start to your Beast setup.

\$1298 www.cougar.com.au



Gigabyte GA-8INXP (E7205 Granite Bay)

With Dual Channel memory support through Intel's new Granite Bay chipset, the GA-8INXP mobo is one of the hottest motherboards for the Pentium 4 to reach our shores.

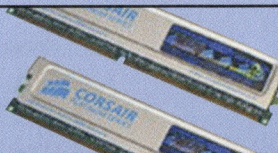
\$470 www.scorpTec.com.au



2GB Corsair XMS3200 TwinX

Corsair TwinX sticks of fast PC3200 DDR SDRAM work best in your Dual Channel GA-8INXP giving trouble-free operation, and leaving you with memory to burn.

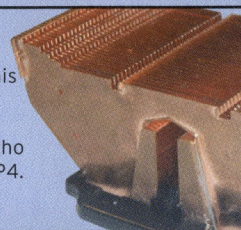
\$1600 www.altech.com.au



Thermalright SLK-900U HSF

Awarded the PCPP Gold Award in this issue, the goliath all-copper Thermalright SLK-900U is the best heatsink money can buy giving mucho headroom to clock your shiny new P4.

\$110 www.pccasegear.com



Antec TruePower 550W PSU

Sticking with tradition, the Antec True Power PSU is the undisputed king when it comes to powering your PC, and with 550 watts to boot, it'll do it no sweat.

\$199 www.pccasegear.com

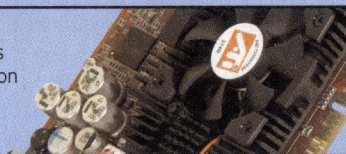


VIDEO SYSTEM AND AUDIO

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\$695 www.scorpTec.com.au



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\$629 www.computeralliance.com.au



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To avoid that knock on the door from annoyed neighbours with noise complaints, a set of Sony MDR-DS5100 Wireless Dolby Headphones with 5.1 virtual sound is your answer.

\$1200 www.sony.com.au



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\$3550 www.scorpTec.com.au



LATEST ADDITION

2GB Corsair XMS3200 TwinX

Ever since we went to Pentium 4 all those months ago, the Beast has used RDRAM for memory, partly because it gave superior performance to DDR and partly because we lived in hope that prices would one day return to Earth. But with the likes of Corsair providing 1GB PC3200 DDR RAM in funky, RD-RAM-esque modules, we thought it was time to return to dual-channel DDR. And with 2GB far cheaper than the RDRAM equivalent - well the choice is a no-brainer.

\$1600 www.altech.com.au



STORAGE AND OPTICAL

Pioneer DVR-A05 Pro

The DVR-A05 Pro is Pioneer's latest all in one optical DVD-R, DVD-RW, CD-R, CD-RW recorder. Why stop at 700MB when you can be copying 9.4GB on Double Sided DVD-R Media?

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ASUS CRW-5224

Offering 52x read, 52x write and 24x re-write this is currently the fastest CDRW drive around.

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Seagate Barracuda ST3120023AS SATA 120GB x2

Thin data cables making your case less cluttered, performance increases over regular ATA100/133, onboard RAID through Gigabyte's GA-8INXP mobo, all combine to make Serial ATA all the rage.

\$726 www.eyo.com.au



Panasonic 3.5" Floppy

Soon optical drives will totally replace the need for the aging 3.5" floppy disk drive, until that time - we best keep one handy

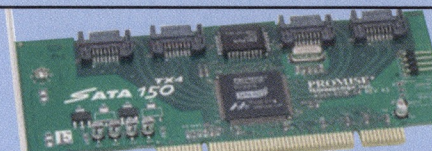
\$25 www.gamedude.com.au



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\$TBA www.adaptec.com (02) 9416 0687



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Samsung SyncMaster 240T 24" TFT

Impress your friends with the most beautiful (and expensive) LCD monitor available. This wide screen gem has it all, and then some. Absolute gaming bliss.

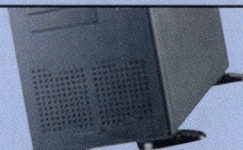
\$8300 www.techbuy.com.au



Lian Li Black PC71 case

It's black, oozing with complete style and class and manufactured by Lian Li - what more could you ask for?

\$460 www.pccasegear.com



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No cables means no tangles and looking like it belongs in the lair of a Bond villain - what more could you want for the Beast?

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At 125Hz it's 25 cycles per second faster than a standard corded mouse and the receiver station also doubles as a recharger. An accurate pointing device it's perfect for all forms of gaming. This is certainly the best mouse ever made!

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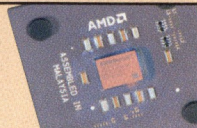
TOTAL BEAST VALUE:

APPROX \$24700

the beastie

AMD Athlon 2200+

Enough power for all your beastie needs \$205



512MB of Kingmax RAM

Rated at DDR333 and 512MB of it you won't have a problem running most games \$275



Abit NF-7

Supporting Dual DDR400, AGP 8X, USB2.0, ATA133 and SoundStorm technology \$215



80GB Seagate Barracuda HDD

7200 RPM with plenty of room for all those games you install \$190



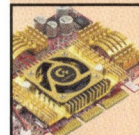
Sony 16X DVD

Not much use having that DVD full of goodness on the cover when you can't look at it \$75



Gigabyte R9000-Pro 2

With 128MB onboard, twin view, DVI support and more this card is perfect for the beastie \$225



Hercules Muse XL

Fully EAX 1 and 2 compatible this is the most affordable surround sound solution \$35



Hyundai F770D 17" CRT

It's big and flat, for gaming in crisp colours \$260



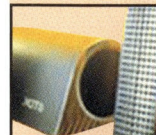
Black Millennium case

Mid Size case with a clear side Perspex window and 350watt PSU \$110

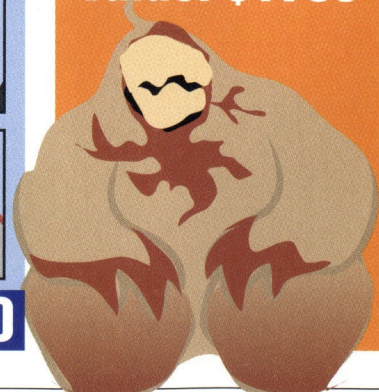


TDK Tremor TS-60

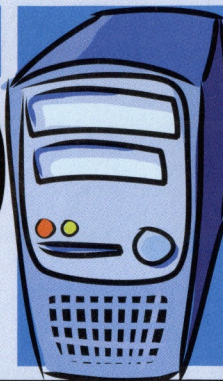
Excellent bass and amazing satellite response \$129



total beastie value: \$1733



SETUP



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LETTER OF THE MONTH: HEAT OVERCLOCK

Q When overclocking the CPU, does the subsequent rise in FSB frequency create excessive pressure/stress on other components such as graphics card, sound card, internal modem etc.,? Congratulations on an excellent section of a great mag.

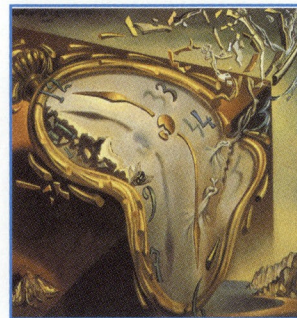
Ian

A With this in mind, there are still many readers with motherboards that DON'T allow for user-controlled asynchronous clock settings. What this means is that while your CPU is getting a neat, overclocked, bio-dermal friendly suntan under the heatsink, the RAM, AGP and anything plugged into the PCI Bus could be dancing a mortal jig. In short, the answer is, yes. In general, overclock refers to the increase of the working frequency of any electronic component working at a specific frequency. The PC receives and

sends its data from and to buses. In the olden days, when Anthony Fordham wore cloth nappies, everything was on the one bus, the Local Bus, because everything ran at 10MHz or thereabouts. At such low clock frequencies, all system components could keep up with each other. In 1987, Compaq, being the clever bunch they are, worked out how to separate the System Bus from the In/Out Bus. This multi-bus architecture has been the standard ever since. The first system bus, in newer designs, is the CPU/RAM/AGP bus, which is now referred to as the Front Side Bus, which runs off the North Bridge chipset and is the chipset of note in a motherboard (815EP, KT133, etc). The AGP is not a Bus, as such, but, is really a Port to Port protocol. The South Bridge is responsible for the other half of the multi-bus architecture and

controls the PS2 devices directly, serial USB and FireWire ports, on-board SCSI Bus, serial and parallel ports on the ISA Bus, and EIDE and adaptor cards (Ethernet, Modem, TV/FM etc) on the parallel PCI Bus. Note that on-board USB/FireWire/SCSI is generally unaffected by overclocking the FSB. On any given FSB frequency (like 533MHz for late model Pentiums) the AGP runs at 66MHz, the PCI Bus at 33MHz and the ISA Bus at 8MHz. If your PC does not support asynchronous adjustments, then all the Bus Frequencies will increase as you wind up the FSB. The ISA Bus doesn't like much over 9MHz. Most PCI adaptors are flaky over 38MHz and will freeze-up at 40MHz. The AGP likes frequencies this side of 70MHz while the reaction of the RAM varies widely. If you happen to run PC-150 on a

133MHz system, then the PCI Bus will give up before the RAM. Corsair manufactures frequency tolerant RAM at 'odd' frequencies, like their PC-3500 designed to run at 434MHz, which is good for an overclocked 400MHz system, and is almost the same as running PC-150 in a 133MHz system. Who knows, we might soon see PC-4400 at 550MHz for overclocked 533MHz system.



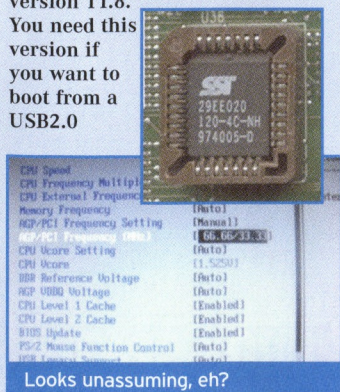
AWOL FILE

Q I read Asher Moses's feature story, 'BIOS Anomaly' (PCPP#84), but I'm still experiencing trouble after I purchased the latest Soltek sl-75drv5 BIOS from their Web Site. I had my boot disk ready, did a thorough scandisk to ensure no bad sectors, and went to the BIOS zip file. It had the 'awdflash.exe' utility in it, the .bin file and a Read.me. The Read.me only gave a basic overview of how to start it with the \sn\py\cc parameters. So, off I went, booted to Win98 via the floppy and entered "awdflash sl-75drv5.bin /sn/py/cc" and pressed enter - just as it said. It was version 8.0.8, or something like that, and had "Please wait" flashing in the progress section on the screen. The floppy light stayed on and that was that. No progress. I shat myself because I thought my BIOS was fried, but after half an hour, I got the courage to hit the reset button and it booted up fine. Nothing appeared to have changed. I then checked any BIOS protection settings, I couldn't find a "BIOS Flash Protection" option in my "Phoenix Award BIOS CMOS Setup", and the closest thing I could find is the "Virus Warning Alert", which I had set to both enabled/disabled. Having it enabled

didn't produce any warning messages when I retried the flash program. I thought it may have been my disk/floppy drive, so I copied the awdflash.exe and .bin file to disk and tried to run it off the disk after booting from the floppy. No difference. It seems like I'm missing something.

Tim

A You missed it big-time, hehe. The file name is 75drv518.bin not sl-75drv5.bin, which is from the latest BIOS version file dated 3 Jan 2003 named: 75drv518.zip, version T1.8. You need this version if you want to boot from a USB2.0



Looks unassuming, eh?

device. You need the earlier version T1.6 if you require AMD support from 2400+ up to 2700+. You need version T1.3 to fix some fan-speed issues while version T1.2 added ABS II (Anti-Burn Shield II), also referred to as SmartDoc, in the BIOS. You enable the system via a jumper on the motherboard and, by default, when the diode reports 85°C, the system turns itself off. This feature is likely to protect your system in instances of fan death or, even, spontaneous heatsink popoff. BTW, don't ever run a BIOS update from the hard-drive.

BIOS FLASHDATE

Read your article on BIOS Flashing (PCPP#83 Setup). I own a S58M MoBo that has a BIOS by Acer computers. I have flashed the BIOS to V-4 but still accesses bugger all, in respect to hardware, etc. Also, I have recently purchased a new 40GB disk and cannot properly install Win98, as I cannot enable LBA in BIOS and,

therefore, scandisk returns bad sectors on a brand new drive. Is there a different BIOS (besides Acer) I can use, or am I in need of an upgrade? My system is a Veriton 5100, 633MHz Intel/Celeron (I know, I know!) beastie specs awaiting. By the way, great mag; I enjoy it every month and derive much information from your articles.

Frustrated Feegs

The Veriton 5100 is an old commercial application desktop. Did you use "s58m_r5c4.zip" or "s58m BIOS UPGRADE R01-F2s1.exe" from the Australian site? The same BIOS is used in the 3100/7100 models with a max disk-size ability of 80GB. As a last resort, you could try the boot block function (search acer.com). I don't know who made this motherboard and have no idea if there is an alternative-vendor BIOS, but the Australian site version may be your best bet.

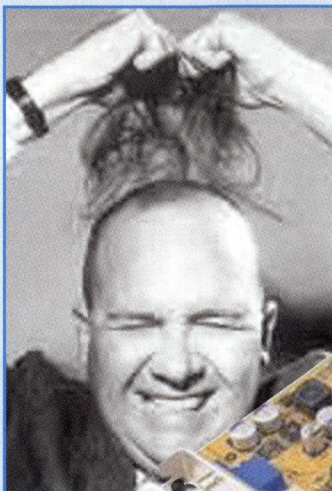


GRAPHICS UPGRADE

My most recent addition to my PC to bring it closer to Beast status was the 128MB ASUS V9280. I can only squeeze 6267 3D marks out of it. I replaced an ASUS V7100T (2439 3D Marks). Anyway, I feel like I'm in a never ending loop of upgrading a graphics card, then motherboard/processor/RAM, then back to graphics card, etc. I will give you my track record of graphics cards so you can laugh at the hideous amount of money I have spent on components. What is the best tweaking program that will work with Detonator 41.09? I used to use NVTweak, until I upgraded to 41.09 drivers. I have reinstalled my PC and only have TweakXP. Also, I never even bothered trying to put the ASUS drivers on, as I already had the Detonators on, so it was just a matter of switching cards. Are you able to give me the answer to this age old question, nVIDIA drivers vs vendor drivers, which one do I use? I have an AMD T-Bird 1.2GHz, GeForce4 128MB Ti4200, 256MB DDR RAM and an IBM 30GB disk. My cards: Matrox M3D, PCI Voodoo2, AGP Voodoo Banshee, Savage 4, ASUS V7100T and ASUS V9280.

Tim

You have a great collection of video adaptors and could be quite the guru on some appropriate hardware forums! The T-Bird CPU and amount of RAM doesn't permit truly outstanding contemporary 3D marks, but the Ti4200 is no slow poke. I don't know of many game games that need much above 64MB of video RAM, yet if it was your intention to future-proof, then it's a competent method. The last 30GB IBM disk was a 7200 RPM ATA100 model, but yours could be only ATA33 or worse - all gamers should have ATA66 or better, both disk and motherboard, using a 40 pin/80 conductor IDE cable (blue/black/grey connectors). Fast new disks are cheap! Always install a late revision of chipset drivers, which in this case is VIA 4in1 (now called Hyperion), and ensure you have at least DirectX8 running. Vendor-released video drivers (ASUS) will generally lag, in terms



The cycle of updating

of revision, the GPU manufacturer's driver set (nVIDIA), so updates are often necessary after some months to ensure that integrated technology, either built-in to the adaptor or a game, is fully utilised. ASUS have previously informed me their driver sets include options and features for their adaptors, but little else is different from nVIDIA's Detonators. Go to tweaktown.com and have a look around for tips and tricks.

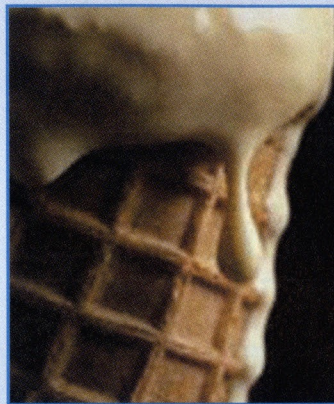
NOW MELTED?

I recently upgraded my computer to an AMD XP2200+, AGP 8x, Ti4200, GA-7VAXP and 512MB of DDR333. I installed the hardware, formatted my drive and moved a switch on the MoBo, so it would run a 133MHz FSB as it was only displaying 100MHz. I made the mistake of installing my TK Volcano 9 heatsink + fan the wrong way, and the temp was at 89°C and was freezing. It's now fixed, but my system is rebooting itself at random times, usually a little more when it's loading something. I have a feeling the temp gauge, which is taped onto the CPU and running through the pins, has melted and is causing the problems, but I'm really not sure what that is. The only hardware I transferred from old PC was a harddrive and my SB 5.1 card. But, I've tried taking it out and it hasn't fixed the problem.

Robb

The XP2200+ runs on a 133MHz FSB at 1800MHz (multiplier 13.5). Your board fires a Northbridge VIA KT400 and supports 200/266/333 MHz FSB processors, that is, double-pumped 100, 133 and 166 MHz units. The 2200+ is a double-pumped 133MHz processor and your settings seem to be correct. The 7VAXP supports an auto detect temperature thermal shutdown function, which should prevent damage to the entire system, but this is not guaranteed. You could have damaged the CPU, despite Gigabyte's precautions. The latest BIOS: 7vaxp_f11.zip F11 (15 Jan 2003), adds supports for the AMD Barton CPU (2500+/2800+/3000+), which you don't actually need, but it does include two previous changes of interest: "1. Support KT400 verA4 chip 2. Modify Top performance setting 3. AGP fast write default enable" and "1. Disable CPU fast command when FSB166Mhz CPU plugged. 2. Modify top

performance setting frequency". I think BIOS: 7vaxp_f9.zip F9 Nov. 25, 2002, is a safe bet if you don't yet want to add Barton support. I'm also curious as to why the board would require a jumper block change for the FSB, because this board is 'jumperless' by nature. To be an AMD Approved mainboard, it must be able to recognise all CPUs, their FSB frequencies and their 'odd' multipliers automatically.



Tastes better than a temp gauge!

MORE BIOS

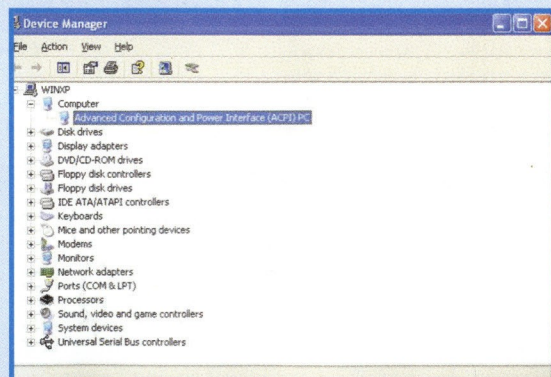
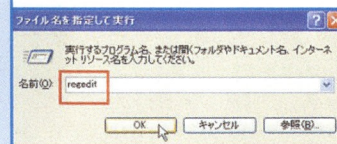
I read the "BIOS anomaly" feature and I'd like help with updating my BIOS. I have a GA-6VC7-4X motherboard. I went to the web site and downloaded the latest BIOS which came with the FLASH853 utility, however, whenever I double click on the flash utility in windows mode, the following messages appear: "chipset is not supported", then, "the flash part is not supported", then, "make sure the flash is not protected". Naturally, I ignored this and continued to copy the flash utility file and the BIOS update file onto my WinXP startup disk. I downloaded the startup disk from bootdisk.com. I rebooted from the startup disk and put the flash name.exe, which worked, then, once in the utility, the same messages appeared. Again, I ignored them and went to the load option and loaded the BIOS file (this is not a .BIN File, but a .FC). But, as the file was loading, another message appeared saying the BIOS update file was invalid and that I should get the 4MB Update and try again. Mine was only 256KB, and I can't see any BIOS update file on the web site that's more than 256KB for my motherboard. Do they mean the driver update?

John

According to Gigabyte, there's no such thing as a GA-6VC7-4X

RE: WINXP PROBLEMS

I was trying to install a network card but everytime I boot into WinXP it finds the network card, finds the drivers, but then says: "Cannot install this hardware. There was a problem installing this hardware: Ethernet Controller. An error occurred during the installation of the device. The Data is Invalid." A To fix this problem, go to Start, Run... and type "regedit" without the quotes to run the Registry Editor. Navigate to: HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE/SYSTEM/CurrentControlSet/ENUM/PCI/ and you will see a number of keys in the form "VEN_xxxx", where xxxx are strings like "1102&DEV_0004&SUBSYS_0001103&REV_04". Under each of these folders will be another folder with a long numerical name. Open each folder and look for the "DeviceDesc" which matches the hardware you are trying to install. Right-click on the "VEN_xxxx" for that device and select 'Permissions' and then tick "Allow" for "Full Control". Close Regedit and then continue with the installation of your device. Derek says: "Thank you all so much for the help. I fixed the problem with editing the stuff in the registry now I'm happily fraggin' at LANs again." Thanks again to everyone who wrote in.



motherboard. The closest match to the description you gave me was a GA-6VXC7-4X... is this your board? I think so; I got 456KB for that latest BIOS. Yes, the GA-6 models use .FC files, but all you do is copy the three files onto a floppy and boot. Please, please check your board model and use the matching BIOS! If you have the wrong BIOS I'm not surprised about the errors.

GRAPHICS ON?

Q I have a K7n420 Pro MoBo (MS-6373) with on-board GF2 64MB 400MX. I want to upgrade my graphics card to an SMedia ATI Radeon 64MB 9000 Pro, but I don't know how to turn off my on-board graphics card. I have read my manual and asked around, but they said I could turn it off in the BIOS or on a jumper, and I can't confirm how to do it.

Abe

A I checked the handbook... nothing. Searched the web site... nothing. Emailed MSI and I find these MSI nFORCE boards will auto-detect an AGP or PCI video adaptor (both, in fact) and disable the on-board 400MX; in fact, any late model on-board video muther will do so. When you plug the Radeon in, change the Init First Display in the BIOS to AGP. It's so simple, it's frustrating, eh?

SORROWWIND

I have an Intel Celeron 1GHz, MSI MS-6368, ViaTech VT8361/VT8601 graphic controller, Via AC'97 audio controller, 256MB RAM, Win98, DirectX 8. I have installed Morrowind, but can't get it to start, as it refuses to launch. An error message shows up "Morrowind Exe caused an invalid page fault in module MORROWIND.EXE... etc." I have the latest patch for Morrowind and have downloaded drivers from VIA and MSI. I then looked on the forums of Morrowind site (the one with all the page listings) and found someone with an Intel chip and Win98 who also had the same problem and without a solution. I can't get this game to start, can you help me? Do I need new drivers or something?

Marcus

Mmmm, I can't get Generals to run on my 815EP, P3-933, MX400 beastie. Nothing is helping at the moment. The error dialogue, something about a .DLL in an ancient Asian language, is not informative, but the game runs perfectly on a Celeron 1.4 and MX440. Here's a checklist: update chipset drivers [from VIA]; update



video adaptor drivers MSI; update the BIOS; update sound drivers; update DirectX; use the latest game patch. Of course, reinstall these files if you are using the latest version. Barebone the system: leave in one disk and nothing else. Occasionally, you have to uninstall Nero Burning ROM, which loads a bunch of .DLLs, .VXD's and other goodies into the system directories - I'm not running Nero v-55107b because my system will boot, but freeze at the desktop. Your video is supplied by an integrated Trident Blade 2D/3D video accelerator run by the VIA VT8601A (510BGA) chipset. I think the problem is it won't cut the mustard. I did a custom upgrade, the other day, on a system that had an S3 Trio 3D/2x... poor thing couldn't even run Warcraft 3, but \$80 later, all was cool on a basic GF2 MX400.

NOTEBOOK DRIVER

I have a notebook that has a 64MB ATI Radeon Mobility M9 8500. At the time of purchasing, I thought M9 is the codename for Radeon 9000, but instead on the specifications print-out it prints 8500. After benchmarking it on a P-4 2.4Ghz with 512MB DDR RAM, I only get 4000 3Dmarks under 1024x768, only a minor improvement of 300 marks over my mate's notebook with a mobility 7500. Well anyway, I thought if I update the drivers I should be able to get a performance increase, but when I visited ATI's official web

site, there isn't a Mobility Radeon 8500 listed in their mobile product list. What's going on and what do I do now?

Jack

I hate this sort of stuff, "Display drivers and multimedia applications for notebooks with ATI graphics solutions are available for download from your Notebook manufacturer", what-tha?! Your chip was only ever sold as an OEM! The MOBILITY drivers supplied with a given laptop or notebook have been specially modified to work in conjunction with the flat panel display and any other graphics or video options installed in that specific computer. As a result of these modifications, ATI CustomerCare is unable to make a "generic" MOBILITY driver available for download. You MUST use the drivers supplied with your laptop or notebook computer, or obtain a driver update from the manufacturer of your laptop or notebook computer. Support for a specific driver feature, such as

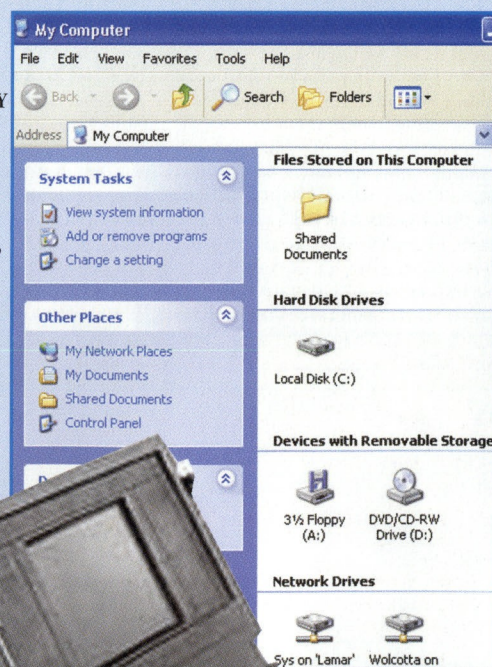
hardware acceleration of OpenGL, may be incorporated into a particular MOBILITY driver at the discretion of the laptop or notebook manufacturer. However, some manufacturers don't, so check first. If you have any questions regarding the features or functionality of a particular driver, please consult with your laptop or notebook manufacturer.

HIDING FILES

I'm running an old hard disk on NTFS under XP. The situation is, I can't move files under my old account to my new hard drive, even after deleting and re-installing Windows. This hard drive is on the verge of going to computer-heaven, and I really need to get this stuff off it. So, I bought a 40GB Seagate Barracuda on the cheap, replacing my old 6.4gb Quantum Fireball. As far as I know, you can't copy 'private' files in your account on NTFS unless you have the password... which I don't, because I had to delete XP and re-install it. Now it seems my files are hidden away from me. I thought of formatting it back to FAT32, but I don't think it's possible under NTFS without wiping the files, which would defeat the purpose. Is there any way I could 'trick' Windows into thinking I'm using this other account, or are my files locked in the file system? I have a WinXP Pro, Quantum Fireball disk and a 40GB Barracuda (both NTFS).

Emp

You can't easily downgrade from NTFS to FAT32, but that's not the issue, depending on what you mean by private. I hope you mean they just had security on them, and not an encryption. As long as the files ARE NOT ENCRYPTED on the NTFS volume, you just have to take ownership of the disc. Log in with full admin rights, right click on disc/properties/security/advanced/owner and set the owner to the current new XP user's name. There'll be funny names there with numbers and letters. They are the users from the previous Windows install. You can delete their permissions and once you're the owner of the disc you can reset all permissions on it.



BROADBAND ISP

I've been wondering if I were to get a broadband connection, will I be able to use it through my own custom ISP? **abc**

Yes, depending how it's done and who with. Some broadband providers don't like web hosting (HTTP:80) through their domestic service. Telstra, for example, will shut you down faster than a falling brick. Optus, on the other hand, don't seem to mind, but the fellow I know doesn't serve much at all

REVIST CHIPSET

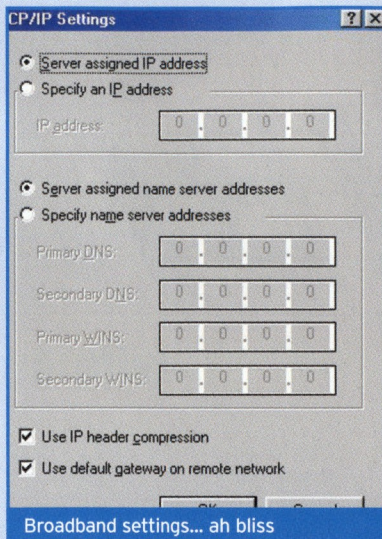
Greetings from across the Tasman. I can't say I've ever written in to a tech help column in a gaming mag before, but for some reason they've always been one of my favourite segments (kudos for your liberal size). However, having seen the way you fobbed off Chris Taylor regarding his GF2 MX200, I felt the need to help the poor fella out. I, too, had this same problem (Duron 1.3, GF4 MX440) and trawled through god knows how many newsgroups and kept finding people with the same problem, but none of them were getting any helpful answers ("try different drivers", "your computer's too crap"). The man can run UT2003 & BF1942, so his computer, sure as anything, can run IronStorm! Finally, I found a helpful soul who had found an answer, the first line of his email read: "I bet you've got a VIA chipset on that motherboard." Install the latest VIA 4in1 drivers (www.viaarena.com/?PageID=2) and the problem will no doubt be solved. These work with hybrid boards, regardless of what it says (mine has an AMD Northbridge).

Simon Austin

Well, Simon and I have corresponded. I told him if I had a dollar for every time I recommended "update the chipset drivers" I wouldn't be typing this on the wrong side of Monday midnight. For once, I boldly recommended another course of action when the simplest thing could have done the job. I'm not convinced about the hybrid issue, as many chipset problems are caused by the hybrids feeding off reference driver sets, such as the 4in1 or Hyperions.

KEEP PLAYING

My PC seems to have an issue when, during any game, it will spit the dummy and crash/reboot! This is very disconcerting (not to mention F**king annoying), especially when it decides to crash in a vital part of a game! My PC only scores about 2500 in a 3D Mark test, which is quite crap! I have a reasonable system (specs in attachment) and I think my problem is probably those Satan worshippers, who put together computer packages, seem to always neglect a decent graphics adaptor in their package, as it was in my



case! I was just wondering if there is any way for a beginner to improve this performance?

Spyder

Reading your specs in the attachment, your GA-7VTXE+ (KT266A), AMD Palomino 1.6GHz (1900+), 512MB RAM and MX400 are sufficient to run almost any game satisfactorily. 3D Marks isn't the real topic for you, and instead talk of your PC should be steered to the beast-like upgrade you will undertake. If you'd like to go faster, the latest beta BIOS (F6a) will recognise a 2600+ CPU; the change log for BIOS F5 dated 28 Jun 2002 doesn't reveal any war winners. The real bottleneck is your video adaptor. Your board is now a discontinued model and can only ever run PC2100 or DDR266 RAM. The AGP is 4x, but I don't think it's AGP2.0 compliant and Gigabyte won't answer my question... an upgrade, perhaps? Oh, I nearly forgot: heat. I repaired a cute little P3-733 the other day and replaced a 4MB ATi with a GeForce2. This particular breed of MX400 had a heatsink, but no fan, and got sufficiently hot to reboot every 30 minutes or so. I popped a 1.6W Sunon down the front of the case and now all is well!



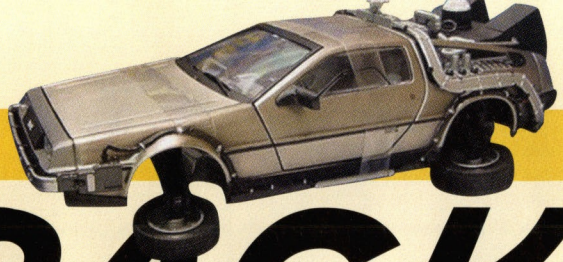
Well that's it!

I've had enough! Alright, so the kitten is mine and the ransom was a sham, you found me out! But you people should be ashamed of yourselves! You let me threaten this poor defenceless creature and didn't lift a finger to try and stop it! All you had to do was go to the website and he would have been saved! How could you? You people are sick! A cute, innocent fluffy little baby kitten and I stood there with a bloody great anvil over its head, AND ALL YOU DID WAS LAUGH! How can you be so callous? Didn't you see his face? (Actually, did you see his little whiskers? They're so gorgeous! You should see him when he's lapping up milk it gets all over his face and then he cleans it off with his little furry paws, aww, it's just the sweetest thing you've ever seen!) Where was I? Oh, that's right! Xaero and I are going home. Shame on you!



www.pcpowerplay.com.au

(OK! OK! The kitten was fine all along, we lied, so sue us. Hey, come to the website and maybe you can pet him!)



FLASHBACK

Games and tech, fondly remembered with Anthony Fordham

MYST

Developer: Cyan
Genre: Puzzle/Adventure
Graphics Mode: SVGA, 256 colours, 640x480
Sound: 8 bit digital effects and speech, CD music
True 3D: Yes, but only for non-interactive battle scenes
Operating System: Windows 3.1
Released: 1994

Until the advent of Maxis' The Sims, Myst was the biggest selling game of all time, enjoying a user base of millions on both PC and, crucially, Macintosh. Like The 7th Guest before it, Myst was a puzzle game disguised as an adventure. The bodiless player entered the game world through a magical book and enjoyed a static first person view of a surreal alien world divided into numerous islands called, inexplicably, ages.

Myst did not fit the high-action, visually flashy world of PC gaming in the mid nineties. It was slow, ponderous even, and focused on obscure puzzles, arcane ramblings on the fate of an ancient race, and extremely dodgy acting on the part of the developers, brothers Robin and Rand Miller. Wandering without direction or much impediment around the island of Myst, the player came across various devices, the correct manipulation of which would allow travel to other ages and repetition of the whole process, although this time with even more obscure machines. The game used visual as well as audio clues to reward players whose thinking was not so much lateral as completely bent.

Magick Obscura

There was a story of sorts; an old mystic by the name of Atrus had unlocked the secrets of an ancient race, the D'ni (pronounced, disconcertingly, "Dunny") and used their magical arts to create a series of ages for his sons, Siris and Achenar. Sadly, as is always the

way with these sorts of things, Siris and Achenar turned bad and everyone ended up either dead or trapped inside 'linking books', waiting for a helpful adventurer to pass by and free them.

If your experience with the game only extends to having had one of your pro-Mac 'friends' go on and on at you at a dinner party about how great it was, then you'd be forgiven for thinking that Myst offered an immersive and deep experience unlike anything previously released. You might have thought Myst was one of the first truly mature games, one that assumed an intelligent audience, a game that transcended gaming to become true art.

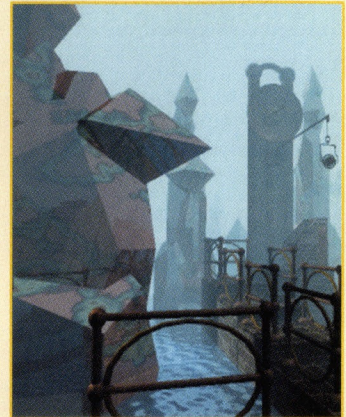
But you need to remember one thing - Myst was developed for Macintosh. It was developed for an underpowered, overpriced, poorly supported platform. This meant that Myst had almost no movement, it was basically a Director project that showed bitmap images overlaid with an occasional window of Quicktime animation, allowing doors to swing open in the painted-on backdrop.

Best graphics ever!

The graphics were 3D only in the sense that they had been pre-rendered on groaning Silicon Graphics machines. When I first handled the Myst box in Games Wizards in Penrith, I thought it looked fantastic. I had been a huge 7th Guest fan and had enjoyed the fully animated location transitions - they weren't in real time, but, by God, they looked good. From

examining the Myst screenshots, I was expecting more of the same. Thank God that I had first read a review in a respected foreign magazine that described the Myst experience as "looking through a series of picture postcards". For such it was: clicking on an exit from a location would simply bring up a new location, with no animated transition whatsoever. Myst was a slide show, and all I could think was how close I had come to spending \$120 on the damn thing, the asking price on first release.

To be fair though, Myst was a small triumph in game design. With such limited technology, the puzzles and sense of progress had to be perfect, and



Mmmm, boxy!

FLASHBACK TECH

SOUNDBLASTER

Manufacturer: Creative Labs
Significance: First mass-market soundcard for the PC that included a digital audio unit allowing for speech and other digital effects in games
Cost: \$300 as a standalone but became standard in PCs costing \$3000
Released: 1989

Soundblaster was the first ever bit of tech that made me jealous of the guy who owned it. I first encountered its wonder not in 1989 when this revolutionary card was first released, but in 1991 on a school trip to Sydney. There, in the bedroom of an old family friend squatted a 386DX running Starcon and the Original Wing Commander. And the sound was just fantastic.

Prior to Soundblaster and a couple of other expensive sound cards of its ilk, sound on the PC was pretty much a hollow joke. Every PC came (indeed, still comes) with a single simple speaker bolted to the inside of the case, capable of not much more than a beep, purr, rattle or whistle. Mac users with tiny 12" screens and hardly any RAM nevertheless were able to crow about Mac's inbuilt sound synthesis which, while hardly spectacular, was still a lot better than a beep.

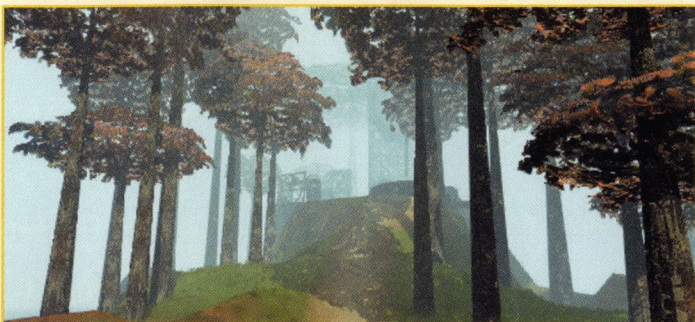
Soldering to victory

Enter Sim Wong Hoo, the plucky Singaporean entrepreneur with an advanced degree in

electronics and a good soldering iron. He launched the now ubiquitous Creative Labs in 1988 and a year later delivered the company's first product to market: Soundblaster.

This primitive 8-bit ISA (an interface that has since been superseded by PCI) card was built around a Yamaha sound synthesis chip called the OPL2. Apart from being an obscure bit of late 80s tech, the OPL2 was also significant for being the same chip used in the market leader of the time, the Adlib soundcard.

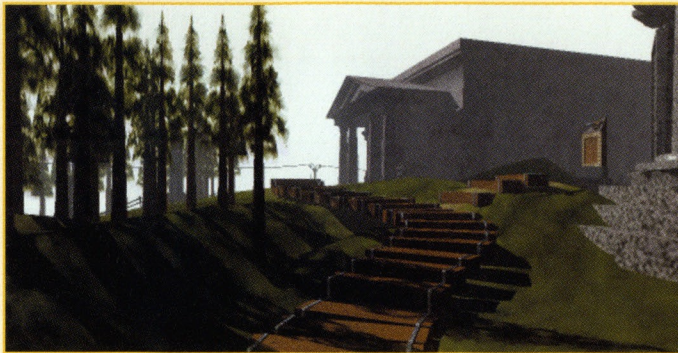
The Adlib should be familiar to many older gamers as a mythical device, which you probably never actually saw, but always had to select in your sound setup utilities - "Adlib or 100% Compatible". Remember, in the early 90s, DirectX was not even a gleam in some underworked Microsoft flunky's eye, and each game had to write its own sound and graphics routines for each available device of the day. And sound was one of the pickiest - select the wrong sound mode for your



Idyllic yes, but don't let it fool you...

THE GRAPHICS

Myst was hailed as a graphical revolution. In truth, it didn't look much better than 7th Guest, and 7th Guest's graphics actually moved. It was all pre-rendered on Silicon Graphics workstations, each one of which would take an entire day to pick through the hundred thousand or so polygons in each scene and then wrap some not even particularly high-res textures around them. The sequel, Riven, was a different kettle of fish altogether. It used exactly the same pre-rendering method, but the scenes really were remarkably complex, using millions of polygons and more importantly, a consistent artistic style that resulted in a deep and detailed world. But the graphics were still static - animation was restricted to small sections within each scene. Meanwhile, as for Myst, amusingly, Mac users kept themselves going through the dark years of the mid nineties by insisting on Myst's graphical superiority. "Quake 2?" they'd shout, "Yeah it looks okay, but did you ever see Myst? Now those were some good graphics!"



Ah, the "Love Nest" Villa - Cabana 4

while thousands howled Myst's damnation to the skies, millions more obsessed over it, and at one point there was a very active (and largely successful) campaign to keep walkthroughs off the more accessible parts of the Internet. Myst became a cult classic with a global following, boosted beyond the realms of mere success largely through the efforts of Mac users desperate for a decent game and overjoyed to find one that allowed them to feel intellectually superior to kids playing Doom.

Myst was a different kind of game. It was slow and thoughtful and attempted to transfix the player through simple aesthetics. While this worked on IT goons who hadn't seen a

real tree in decades, it was perhaps less effective on the population at large - Myst was definitely a favourite among people who spent a lot of time sitting down, monitoring a large computer network for instance. However, it was also popular among corporate drones stuck high in lofty towers with nothing to do, but idly sack another thousand line workers. Once again, Myst's slow pace made it ideal for this kind of 'gamer'. It was possible to pick through a couple of locations, go and do some

work, and then return to the game. It was a turn-based adventure.

Snowball effect

Eventually, Myst's popularity and success snowballed, producing an excellent sequel in the form of Riven (a game that really did transcend its slide-show dynamic by having remarkably detailed visuals), a whole series of very mediocre novels, a second sequel which was freelanced out to the now defunct Presto Studios, and finally Myst Online which remains unreleased and as yet untested. Can the curious dynamic of empty worlds full of whimsical machines translate into a viable MMORPG? This magazine will keep you informed.

Love it or loathe it, Myst was one of the few games that can truly be described as important - it got the 'mass market' rolling for PC gaming (despite being developed for Mac), it sold in enough numbers to make big-time publishers look up and most of all, it proved that pixelated fat guys with beards could be heroes to an entire generation of Linux geeks.

WHY MYST SHOULD BE REMEMBERED

- Leanest gameplay ever, not even much animation!
- Obsessed a whole generation of sys admins, execs and Lit. majors
- Showed that technology can always be beaten out by gameplay
- Gave Mac users hope in a sea of despair

CREATIVE LABS

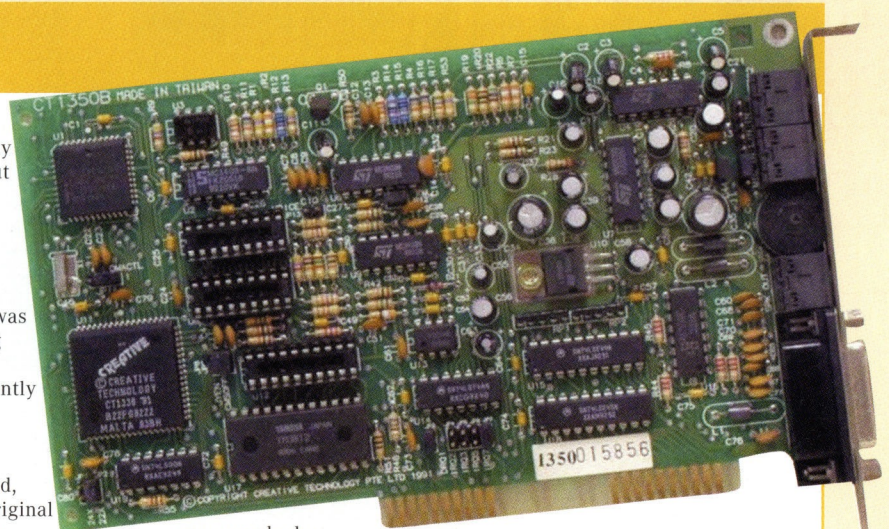
Creative is one of those companies that remains very difficult to hate. Sure, they now have an effective monopoly on all soundcards and can set prices at whatever they like, but the fact remains that every year or two without fail they bring out some amazing new piece of technology that significantly enhances our gaming experience. We were sure they wouldn't be able to outdo the SB Live!, which took professional level kit and jammed it into an elegant consumer level package. But then they busted out the Audigy, the impressively specced 'sound centre' that made all other audio equipment attached to your PC completely unnecessary. Hot on the heels of the Audigy came the Extigy, an external sound 'card' that connected through a simple USB interface. And now we have the Audigy 2, even more powerful and offering every kind of digital sound support under the sun. Our only question then remains: where the hell does Creative go from here? Hopefully, we shall be pleasantly surprised.

card and you'd get nothing from your shiny new copy of Dune 2, but a horrible squelching sound.

Audio masterminds

Creative's real genius was twofold - first, by using the OPL2 chip, the Soundblaster was instantly compatible with the majority of games, as everyone but everyone supported Adlib. Second, unlike the Adlib, the original Soundblaster included a digital audio unit. The Adlib used a method called FM Synthesis to 'pretend' it could create the sound of a number of different instruments, kind of like a really cheap electronic keyboard. However, all you really got from an Adlib was music, with a few bleepy bloopy sound effects that had a retro arcade feel to them, but not much fidelity. The Soundblaster, on the other hand, was actually capable of speech!

Unfortunately, the advent of the Soundblaster and its subsequent iterations the SB Pro and SB 16 gave rise to one of the most shameful rip-off products in the history of gaming - the speech pack. Games, particularly Origin games, were shipped with minimal or no speech and if



you were lucky enough to own a Soundblaster you would have to fork out an additional \$45 for the speech pack, basically a disk full of compressed .wav files that slotted into your game directory. Unfortunately, the amount of extra speech that could be fitted on three floppy disks was also pretty minimal and the results of your \$45 outlay were anything but spectacular. I can remember desperately battling my way to a new cutscene in Wing Commander 2 in hopes of getting a bit more speech, only to be cruelly crushed by yet more heavily aliased white subtitles. It certainly seems odd today, where speech is de rigueur and jaded reviewers pour scorn on the acting talents of the faceless nobodies who bring voice to our games -

remember, there was once a time, not so long ago, where there was no voice at all.

Fitting tribute

Like VGA graphics, the Soundblaster was a seminal piece of PC hardware that helped drag the PC out of the nerdy businessman's study and into the nerdy gamer's bedroom. Without Soundblaster and other digital soundcards, we'd still be bleeping and blooping the nights away, and concepts such as 6.1 channel Dolby DTS surround would remain restricted to cinemas and rich kid's living rooms. All hail Soundblaster, I say. Now if you'll excuse me, I'm off to hear that woman say "Only one house will prevail!" just one more time... ooh yeah.



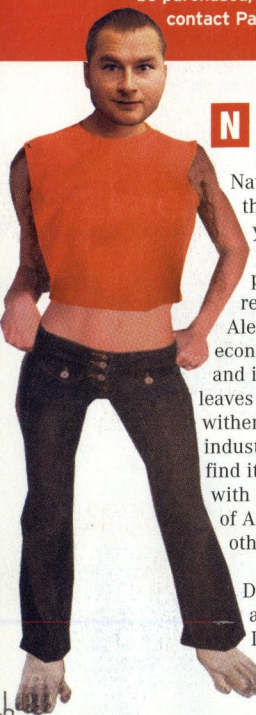
THE DISC

REQUESTS

We welcome requests so please forward your requests to Disc Producer Paul Noone via email at cdgod@next.com.au or write to PCPP DVD Requests, 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016

DVD OR CDS NOT WORKING?

PC PowerPlay can only replace discs that are faulty at the time of purchase, not after the fact. Replacement discs cannot be purchased, so please take good care of them. If your disc is damaged or doesn't function as intended then please contact Paul Noone immediately by emailing him at: cdgod@next.com.au



No small find this month was a little gem called Enemy Nations. Touted as the "greatest game you've never played" this RTS prize has more resources than Red Alert, a better economy than Settlers and industry that leaves Warcraft withering in pre-industrial times. You'll find it in Spotlight along with the next episode of Anachronox and other movies.

The big names in Demos this issue are obviously Devastation, Line of Sight: Vietnam and Mistmare. But,

there're a whole bunch of lesser known titles sure to surprise you. Mistmare and Purge aren't to be missed, but for the online RPGers out there your character's Spirit will probably get a quick +2 at the sight of the latest Lineage release and the new Prince of Qin beta. Not to be outdone in any small way, our modding brethren have been hard at work, too, breathing new life into your favourite games. BF1942 appears to be the flavour of the month and with mods like Killer Commando and Operation Aberdeen, it come as no surprise. Expect to see the latest Desert Combat release next issue, but in the meantime, get stuck into the bonus packs for both BF1942 and UT2003 we nabbed for you.

If you think you're done, then think again. The Bunker is jam-packed with more skins, maps, wallpapers and miscellaneous gold flecks than you could waggle a prospector's pan at, so dig in and find your fortune!

Paul Noone
Disc Master
cdgod@next.com.au

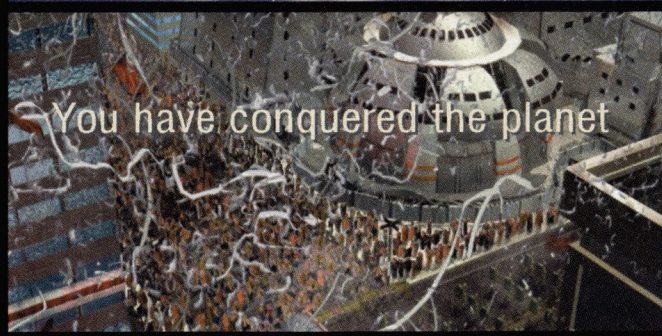
FREE GAME!

Treat yourself to a bit of naughtiness!

Meet interesting people on the Internet, then build big tanks and show the bastards who's boss! This is the battle for the last planet. Now that you've landed on the last planet, all you have to do is feed your people, power your city, fuel your economy, deploy your army and destroy Enemy Nations before they try to destroy you. Some of the features of this game include:

- Multi-player
- No limit to the number of players
- A server to find all available players on the internet
- Resource and information sharing in multi-player games:
- A fully adaptive real-time AI opponent or opponents
- A much richer combat model
- Wrapping map, so you can attack enemies from all sides
- A full research and development with over 50 items
- Runs at the resolution of your monitor

ENEMY NATIONS



AIRPORT TYCOON 2

Fly the friendly skies!

Airport Tycoon 2 is the recently released 3D management strategy game by Global Star Software. The demo gives you one full game-year to build a major Airport in Tokyo, Japan. It will provide players with two complete technology levels to build various buildings, such as three unique terminals, various support and cargo structures, a fire-station, a 2000m runway and more.



BANDITS

Would ya hark at the bairn!

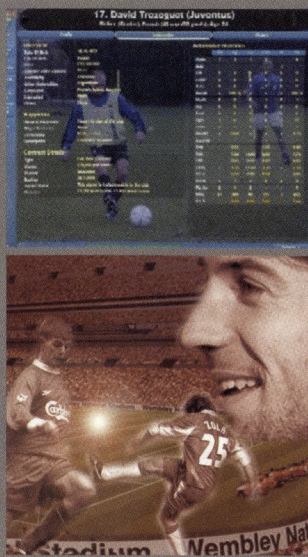
Trisynergy presents two new demos of Bandits: Phoenix Rising! Drive a cannon-mounted vehicle bringing destruction to all in the Multiplayer demo or go at it by yourself in the Single Player demo. Cruise in a cannon-mounted combat in a 3D adventure across green fields, desert canyons and deep snow, bombing and blasting others online. The single player demo of Bandits: Phoenix Rising allows you to play through a portion of this vehicular combat title. Ride in a buggy with a top-mounted cannon causing chaos all around you.



CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4

Be like Alex

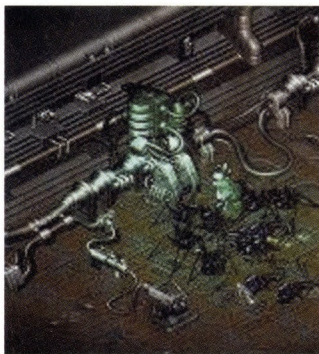
The distinguished SBS pundits refer to this sport as the beautiful game, but no sane person would ever think that of CM4. It is, after all, little more than a spreadsheet, but it's the deepest, most compelling spreadsheet you're ever likely to encounter, especially if you understand the complexities of soccer's many strategic considerations. It's the soccer fan's ultimate dream. But, are you an Arsene Wenger or a Terry Venables? CM4 is the next generation of football management games offering more players, leagues and competitions than any other title. For the first time ever in the series, CM4 features a 2D match engine enabling you to make tactical decisions as the action unfolds. Watch the whole match or choose to view the highlights.



HARBINGER

You must choose... wisely

As a member of a small raider community, these corridors are the only home you've known. You've been living on scraps with enemies on all sides. We live by unspoken laws down here and the bloodhungry are never far behind. The choices you make now will affect everything from here on. The demo lets you play as a level 6 Human powered up with advanced weaponry, armor and skills. The demo features original quest dialog not found in the retail release, two new levels, and 12 of the 65 enemy types in the full game.



PURGE

Purge yourself of demons and be healed sinner!

Purge is a FPS that lets players take sides in future world where technology fights magic. Players can choose one of several classes from the two factions in the game, giving them special skills and weapons proficiencies that can counter the powers of other classes in the game. Purge supports a variety of unique gameplay modes, supports up to 64 players at once and features 32 weapons.



THE WAR FOR PEACE

We're in so much trouble

The War For Peace is a simulation of the current Iraqi/US crisis. If you think George Dubbya made some stupid choices, now it's your turn. You play the president. Choose from various Presidential Directives - Peace, War, Covert Operations, UN Inspections/Spy Plane Missions, Support Iraqi Opposition and more. Your decisions will affect the ultimate outcome. Be it civil war, coup, terrorist retaliation, Iranian invasion, Turkish invasion, etc., it begins like this: "The Iraqis are in violation of every UN Resolution calling for their disarmament and the destruction of weapons. A way must be found to disarm the Iraqi regime. The decision is yours, Mr. President." Indeed.



DEVASTATION

The peasants are revolting!

As the Resistance leader in a devastated, multi-national corporation oppressed future, you must assemble your army and travel the globe, restoring peace and sanity in a very dangerous world. This is a multiplayer demo which features Deathmatch and CTF in the Embarcadero Depot and Union Rail Yard. Both maps contain powerful weapons and interactive objects.



LINE OF SIGHT: VIETNAM

They call me The Grey Ghost

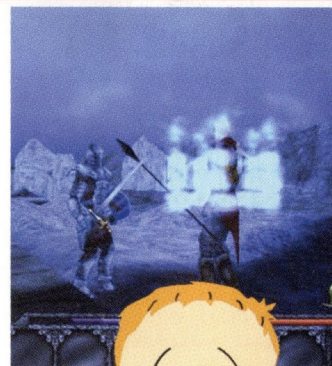
In Line of Sight: Vietnam your job is to locate elusive enemy soldiers and pick them off one-by-one. Whether patiently waiting for the enemy to show himself or delivering a pre-emptive strike, the method is the same - be quick, be quiet, and be careful. That's what will get you home alive. This demo features a tutorial, single player mission, 3 multiplayer maps with 4 modes of play.



MISTMARE

My timbers have been shivering for months, mate

Join Isador, the inquisitor monk, on an epic journey through Europe ravaged by years of conflict. The fate of the world lands squarely on your shoulders, as you visit great European cities isolated from each other for hundreds of years, trying to find the person who escalated a personal conflict into a quickly unfolding drama that encompasses the known world. Here's the latest non-beta patch at the time of production - mistmare-patch12.exe. Check the official site for more recent patches AFTER installing this one.



PLUS:

Prince of Qin

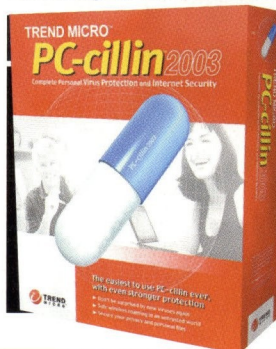
Pro Bass Fishing 2003

Purge

South Park Super Mario Bros 2

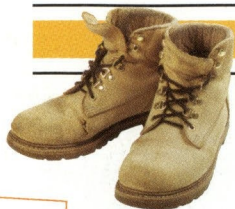
The War for Peace

Lineage: Lands of Aden - Episode XII



DISC VIRUS SCANNING

All files on CD PowerPlay and DVD PowerPlay are scanned with PC-Cillin 2003. For more information please visit: www.manac.com.au/VirusCheck



Yellow Boots

MALL KEEPER 2004

Extreme shopping calls for extreme measures

The Boots and I love to shop. Specifically, we love to shop for new electronic gadgetry things we can use to fill our exciting top floor Balmain apartment. Useful stuff, you know, like electric can openers with web access, fridges with odometers built into them and a TV that can make toasted sandwiches.

It's because of this techno-fetish that the Boots and I must continually subject ourselves to the cruel slavemongering of the so-called 'real life' staffers of PCPP, because buying techno gadgetry is a lot like supporting a drug habit, at least in terms of expense.

Every game worth its salt has some kind of shop built into it, whether it be a Level 10 weapons boutique in yet another generic vertically scrolling shooter or the rather more esoteric bikini stalls of DOA: Extreme Beach Volleyball, yet strangely enough there are few games dedicated exclusively to the wonderful pursuit of shopping. And that's why on the top floor of the brand new downtown Ultramall (a Lockheed-Martin Myer shopping initiative), new startup developers Klepto Studios were busily putting the starting touches on a unique new game design: Mall Keeper 2004.

I met the Klepto team not in their half-constructed offices, but rather down on the factory floor, as it were - the central promenade of Ultramall where costume jewellery stores clustered like gaudy limpets on the metaphorical hulls of the big department store chains and endless HMV and Sanity music shops stood locked in dread combat, each trying to down out the other with aggressive may-or-may-not-be-lesbian Russian pop.

I had thought the name Klepto was supposed to be ironic - a game about retail developed by compulsive thieves. However, a few minutes into the interview I was forced to think again.

"Mall Keeper 2004 aims to simulate all aspects of operating a major shopping centre," said project leader Gaia Templetrod, as she shovelled cheap bracelets into her backpack while her colleagues distracted the stall owner by asking penetrating questions about numerology. "It's a sort of digital life thing. We give you all the pieces and tools you need and you have to set up the most profitable mall you can. Profit is the only measure of

success in the game. If you don't make profit, you get the arse."

I nodded sagely as she selected a couple of dangly crystal things and dropped them with expert ease down her not-ungenerous cleavage. We moved on to a small electronics outlet that sold cheap overseas knockoffs too plasticky even for the likes of me to touch. Klepto's lead programmer, Kel Fromage, stepped in to the conversation with what looked suspiciously like a small portable television shoved up his jumper.

"I've been looked at fractals a lot," he began, but then wandered off without further explanation. The shop attendants were peering suspiciously through the haze created by their teenage hormones. Something, they felt, was not quite right.

"Mall security is the best bit," said Gaia again, now wearing an indoor TV antenna as some kind of hair clip, "you can hire all these hard case ex-military types, fit them out with the latest semi-automatic weaponry and then let them loose on the scungy teens that come to the mall to just hang out."

"And you can set it so if people don't spend a certain amount of money within a certain time frame, they get molested by plain-clothes store detectives with stereotypical British accents," added another Klepto functionary, who was too heavily obscured by a mountain of thieved goods for me to identify.

"Hey..." said one of the store clerks, a little uncertainly, as Kel Fromage stuffed a large remote control jeep down the front of his pants. He was quite unabashed by it.

"Let's go get cheeseburgers!" said someone else.

By this time there were quite a number of clerks, store detectives and real life ex-military mall security personnel shadowing the little crowd of Klepto staff, clearly alerted by the bulgy nature of the team's jumpers, and as we joined the queue at the nearest McDonalds, the expectant mothers burdened by screaming toddlers had to make way as our swelling group shouldered its way to the counter.

"Can I have a," began Kel Fromage, and at that point an imitation Gucci handbag, an Xbox controller still in its wrapper and the small portable TV I'd noticed earlier all fell out of his jumper and hit the Food Court's fake parquet floor with a clatter as loud as the knock of doom.

There was a dangerous pause, and then the clerks, detectives, security guys and a passing Ronald McDonald all started shouting and jostling at once. Klepto dealt with the situation by hurling their trophies into the gathering crowd, starting a sort of riot as the expectant mothers began fighting the afore-mentioned scungy teens for cheap consumer goods. I held my notepad high above the melee and tried to keep my nose above the gathering funk generated by fifty teens all exerting themselves. Eventually, Kel Fromage climbed on to the Maccas counter and held a skull-shaped zippo lighter he'd flogged from the Harley Davidson store up to one of the fire sprinklers that dotted the roof.

The little vial thing shattered and the untested sprinklers activated, squirting about eighty litres of black gunk from the new pipes onto everyone and then settling down to a steady stream of freezing water.

By this point, the fight had turned nasty, so I slipped and slid my way out from the flailing boots and elbows and headed for the

nearest exit. As I neared the doors I had just enough time to realise Gaia had slipped a new Gameboy Advance SP into my pocket before I was brought down by a flying tackle from a burly ex-military security guy named, I learned later over an apologetic beer, Simon.

Incidentally, if you ever visit the Ultramall, don't eat the sushi there. It's ghastly.

SECURITY



SHOE SHOPS

On the theme of shopping, there is one kind of shop that I am sadly never allowed inside, and that is of course a shoe shop. If I so much as glance toward an exciting new Colorado window display, the resulting tantrum is so severe that even heavily tattooed men with scary mullet haircuts cover their ears and hurry away. I would dearly like to try on a pair of those new sneakers that don't have any laces and seem to just suck onto your feet like some kind of heavily genetically modified octopus, but alas, the resulting emotional blackmail would just not be worth it. It's a shame you know, because at times I think it's not my computer geek tendencies that have kept me from sports all these years, but rather the heavy-arse Boots I wear all day every day. Don't see the connection? Then you try sprinting up a hockey field with six kilos of galvanised leather strapped to your ankles.

PCPP#88 on sale
4th June 2003

MODWARE

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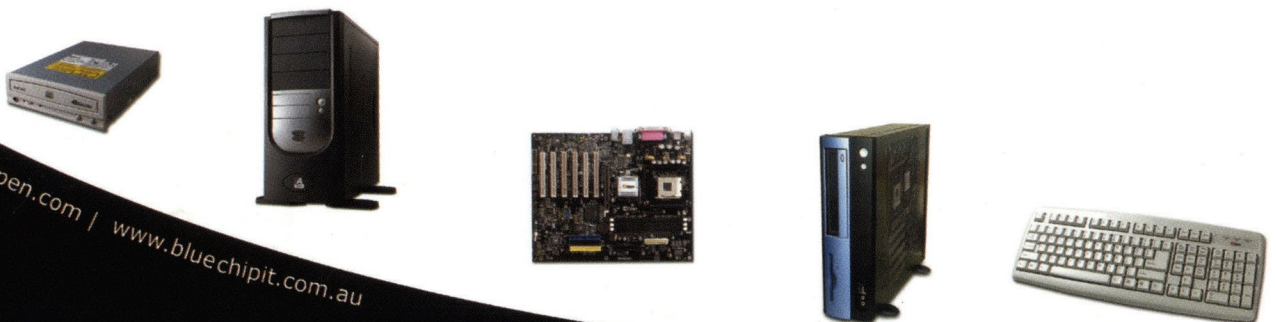


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	Parallel ATA	Serial ATA
Bandwidth	100/133 MB/Secs	150 MB/Secs *
Volts	5V	250mV
Pins	40 pin	7 pin
Length Limitation	45.72	100
Ventilation	No	Yes
Peer-to-Peer	No	Yes



EzRestore Instant Restoration System

The kernel in BIOS can provide best compatibility to motherboard, and the Pre-OS can protect any virus or accident OS crash after BIOS boot. Basically, only a mere 100MB is enough for hard disk of any size. (please visit AOpen website to get more information. <http://english.aopen.com.tw/tech/techinside/EzRestore.htm>)

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